Galaxy®
MAGAZINE

FEBRUARY 1960

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MEETING OF THE MINDS
by
ROBERT SHECKLEY

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THE DAY THE ICICLE WORKS CLOSED
by
FREDERIK POHL

•

ONE PLANET — ONE LANGUAGE
by
WILLY LEY

•

THE NUSE MAN MAN
by
MARGARET ST. CLAIR

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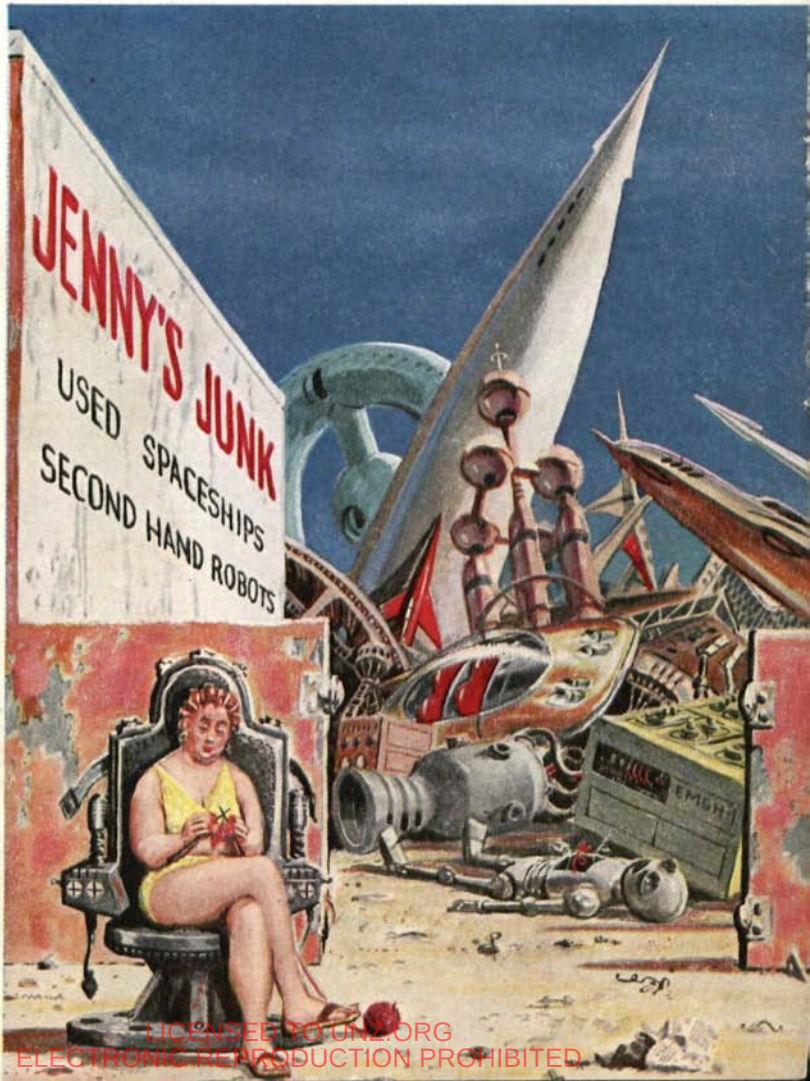

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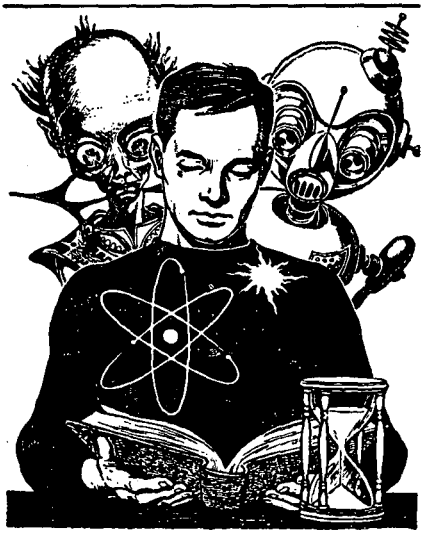

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CONTENTS

NOVELLA

MEETING OF THE MINDS ..... *by Robert Sheckley* 8

NOVELETS

THE DAY THE ICICLE WORKS CLOSED ..... *by Frederik Pohl* 68
CRYING JAG ..... *by Clifford D. Simak* 128
DEATH'S WISHER ..... *by Jim Wannamaker* 170

SHORT STORIES

THE NUSE MAN ..... *by Margaret St. Clair* 44
DUMBWAITER ..... *by James Stamers* 55
SOMETHING BRIGHT ..... *by Zenna Henderson* 113
EAST IN THE MORNING ..... *by David E. Fisher* 152

SCIENCE DEPARTMENT

FOR YOUR INFORMATION ..... *by Willy Ley* 102
One Planet — One Language

FEATURES

EDITOR'S PAGE ..... *by H. L. Gold* 6
FORECAST 54
GALAXY'S FIVE STAR SHELF ..... *by Floyd C. Gale* 164

Cover by Emsh: Home on the Rocket Range

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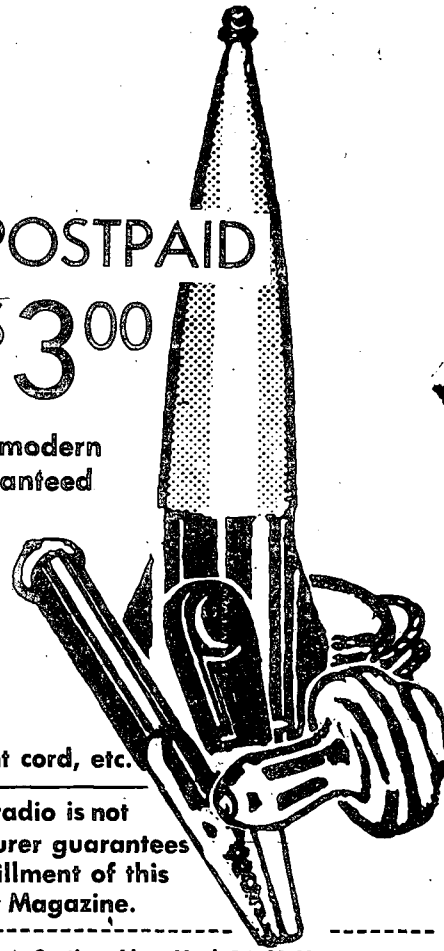

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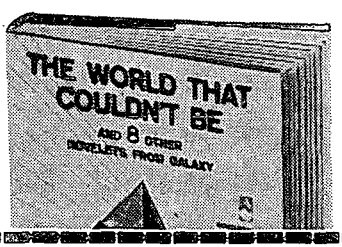

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WHAT KIND OF FICTION?

EVER read this one?

"Lancelot Buckmeister climbed the long stairs to the observation platform of the ancient, abandoned Empire State Building and scanned the skies. There it was! The faint glint of light that was far Alpha Centauri, where humanity's last surviving hope swung in orbit around a strange new star."

We did, but we sent it back to the writer with a polite note that said, "If Lancelot wanted a closer look at Alpha Centauri, he would have done better to climb the long stairs down to the ancient, abandoned 34th Street Station of the BMT. He would have had to look directly through a few thousand miles of Earth in any case. Centaurus is a southern constellation."

Plowing as we do through some millions of words each year to find the right number of serials, novellas, novelets and shorts to fill GALAXY, we hit this sort of thing with distressing frequency. It isn't always as bad as this. Sometimes (all too often!) it is far worse. Why? What keeps writers, especially new writers, from doing enough reading in the subjects they are writing about to avoid blunders?

Nothing. And yet—the incoming manuscript heap is constantly hip-high with rockets that won't move once they are out in space (because there's no air for them to push against), bombs "dropped" from satellites (why not "drop" a bomb from Mars?), and so — endlessly — on.

That's an editor's job, of course, and we do our best. But there's another problem where the editor can't help much — a much worse problem in terms of the eternal struggle to find enough first-class stories.

That problem is the aridity of ideas.

Here, more than anywhere else, is where writers must learn to do their homework. There are stories to be written that cannot be conjured up out of last decade's textbooks, stories that come out of today's latest fruits from the laboratories and the institutes.

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DOZENS of magazines and technical journals keep us up to date on what is new in modern science, invention and technology. What is new is a very great deal. Take only one magazine — the current issue of *Industrial Research*, say — and thumb through it. Page 12 tells about the astonishing new "aqua-therm" — a "pipeless pipe" that conducts water through water in a way, and with a precision, that must be seen to be believed. It melts ice, it keeps fish alive, it helps unbury buried treasure at the bottom of the sea. Is there a story there? Probably a dozen of them — ranging from an ice-free Arctic to, perhaps, a whole new concept of underwater farming.

Page 28 opens up a new world of lighting based on the phenomenon of electroluminescence, including such attractive notions as "see-through" windows that emit light on both sides without obstructing vision.

Page 84 designs half a dozen new spacecraft for us, licking the acute problems involved in getting rid of the heat of re-entry by such diverse schemes as shedding hot sparks, "sweating," "heat-sinks" and, most provocative of all, the magneto-hydrodynamic screen which keeps ship and air from contact in the first place. It tells us that "man will orbit the Earth by the end of 1959" (did he? It may be happening while this issue is on the press!) And it completes the schedule of conquering space as follows: "Land on the Moon by 1965; be on Mars and Venus three years later; and travel almost as fast as light, that is, 670 million mph, within 40 years."

That is — Alpha Centauri before we are out of the 20th century.

Maybe Lancelot Buckmeister will have something to look for after all!

That's only one issue of one magazine, and only the barest quick scanning of its contents. There must be many stories here; there's no way of telling, given fertile imagination and writing skill, what line on what page might produce a great new story. But the pity is that the stories won't write themselves.

With about one technical graduate in four going into research, with the nation's Research & Development spending running to hundreds of millions of dollars a month, the laboratories are turning out material enough for all our plot-provoking needs. And science-fiction writers are the logical pipeline between the scientists and the public, as far as the *interpretation* (not the mere reporting) of new ideas is concerned. It is the imagination in depth of a first-rate science fiction writer that can flesh out a dry technical report and show us in human

(Continued on page 194)

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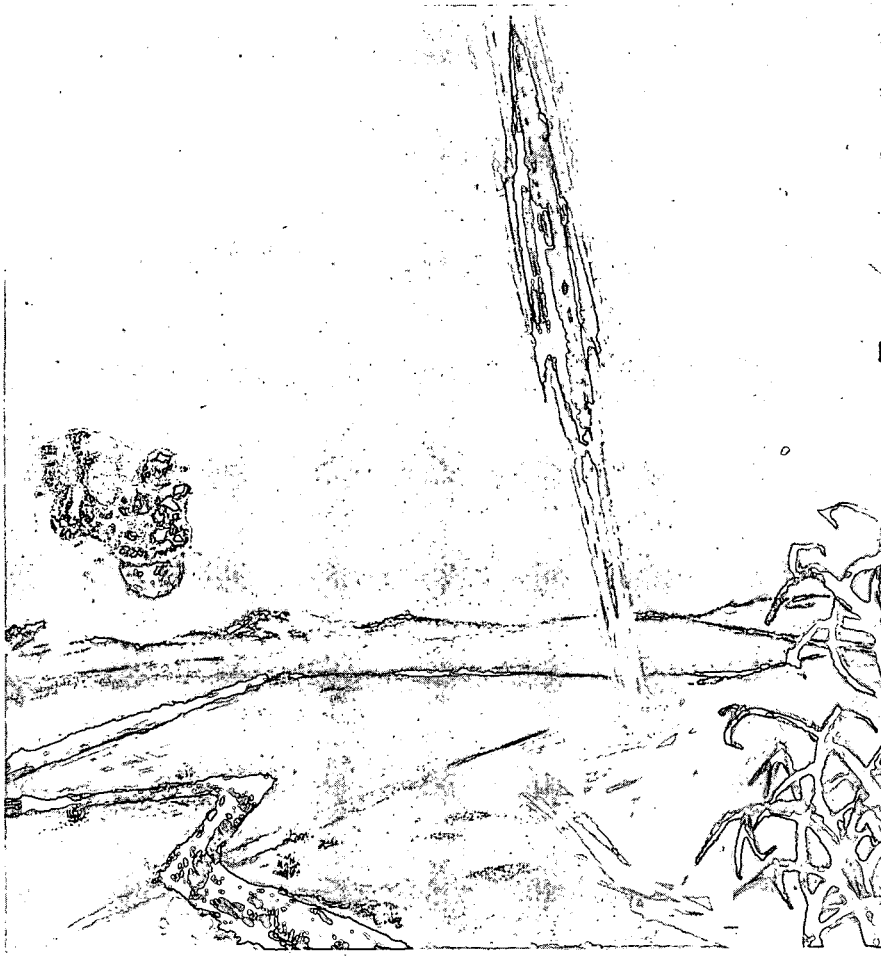
Meeting of the



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Minds

By ROBERT SHECKLEY

What mission had the Quedak been given?

Even he couldn't remember any more—but

he refused to die till it was completed!

Illustrated by DICK FRANCIS

PART ONE

THE Quedak lay on a small hilltop and watched a slender jet of light descend through the sky. The feather-tailed jet was golden, and brighter than the sun. Poised above it was a glistening metallic object, fabricated rather than natural, hauntingly familiar. The Quedak tried to think what it was.

He couldn't remember. His memories had atrophied with his

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functions, leaving only scattered fragments of images. He searched among them now, leafing through his brief scraps of ruined cities, dying populations, a blue-water-filled canal, two moons, a spaceship...

That was it. The descending object was a *spaceship*. There had been many of them during the great days of the Quedak.

Those great days were over, buried forever beneath the powdery sands. Only the Quedak remained. He had life and he had a mission to perform. The driving urgency of his mission remained, even after memory and function had failed.

As the Quedak watched, the spaceship dipped lower. It wobbled and sidejets kicked out to straighten it. With a gentle explosion of dust, the spaceship settled tail first on the arid plain.

And the Quedak, driven by the imperative Quedak mission, dragged itself painfully down from the little hilltop. Every movement was an agony. If he were a selfish creature, the Quedak would have died. But he was not selfish. Quedaks owed a duty to the universe; and that spaceship, after all the blank years, was a link to other worlds, to planets where the Quedak could live again and give his services to the native fauna.

He crawled, a centimeter at a time, and wondered whether he had the strength to reach the alien spaceship before it left this dusty, dead planet.

CAPTAIN JENSEN of the spaceship *Southern Cross* was bored sick with Mars. He and his men had been here for ten days. They had found no important archeological specimens, no tantalizing hints of ancient cities such as the *Polaris* expedition had discovered at the South Pole. Here there was nothing but sand, a few weary shrubs, and a rolling hill or two. Their biggest find so far had been three pottery shards.

Jensen readjusted his oxygen booster. Over the rise of a hill he saw his two men returning.

"Anything interesting?" he asked.

"Just this," said engineer Vayne, holding up an inch of corroded blade without a handle.

"Better than nothing," Jensen said. "How about you, Wilks?"

The navigator shrugged his shoulders. "Just photographs of the landscape."

"OK," Jensen said. "Dump everything into the sterilizer and let's get going."

Wilks looked mournful. "Captain, one quick sweep to the north might turn up something really—"

"Not a chance," Jensen said. "Fuel, food, water, everything was calculated for a ten-day stay. That's three days longer than *Polaris* had.

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We're taking off this evening."

The men nodded. They had no reason to complain. As the second to land on Mars, they were sure of a small but respectable footnote in the history books. They put their equipment through the sterilizer vent, sealed it, and climbed the ladder to the lock. Once they were inside, Vayne closed and dogged the hatch, and started to open the inside pressure door.

"Hold it!" Jensen called out.

"What's the matter?"

"I thought I saw something on your boot," Jensen said. "Something like a big bug."

Vayne quickly ran his hands down the sides of his boots. The two men circled him, examining his clothing.

"Shut that inner door," the captain said. "Wilks, did you see anything?"

"Not a thing," the navigator said. "Are you sure, Cap? We haven't found anything that looks like animal or insect life here. Only a few plants."

"I could have sworn I saw something," Jensen said. "Maybe I was wrong . . . Anyhow, we'll fumigate our clothes before we enter the ship proper. No sense taking any chance of bringing back some kind of Martian bug."

The men removed their clothing and boots and stuffed them into the chute. They searched the bare steel room carefully.

"Nothing here," Jensen said at last. "OK, let's go inside."

Once inside the ship, they sealed off the lock and fumigated it. The Quedak, who had crept inside earlier through the partially opened pressure door, listened to the distant hiss of gas. After a while he heard the jets begin to fire.

The Quedak retreated to the dark rear of the ship. He found a metal shelf and attached himself to the underside of it near the wall. After a while he felt the ship tremble.

THE QUEDAK clung to the shelf during the long, slow flight through space. He had forgotten what spaceships were like, but now memory revived briefly. He felt blazing heat and freezing cold. Adjusting to the temperature changes drained his small store of vitality, and the Quedak began to wonder if he was going to die.

He *refused* to die. Not while there was still a possibility of accomplishing the Quedak mission.

In time he felt the harsh pull of gravity, and felt the main jets firing again. The ship was coming down to its planet.

AFTER a routine landing, Captain Jensen and his men were taken to Medic Checkpoint, where they were thumped, probed and tested for any sign of disease.

Their spaceship was lowered to

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a flatcar and taken past rows of moonships and ICBMs to Decontamination Stage One. Here the sealed outer hull was washed down with powerful cleansing sprays. By evening, the ship was taken to Decontamination Stage Two.

A team of two inspectors equipped with bulky tanks and hoses undogged the hatch and entered, shutting the hatch behind them.

They began at the bow, methodically spraying as they moved toward the rear. Everything seemed in order; no animals or plants, no trace of mold such as the first Luna expedition had brought back.

"Do you really think this is necessary?" the assistant inspector asked. He had already requested a transfer to Flight Control.

"Sure it is," the senior inspector said. "Can't tell what these ships might bring in."

"I suppose so," the assistant said. "Still, a Martian whoosis wouldn't even be able to live on Earth. Would it?"

"How should I know?" the senior inspector said. "I'm no botanist. Maybe they don't know, either."

"Seems like a waste of — hey!"

"What is it?" the senior inspector asked.

"I thought I saw something," the assistant said. "Looked a little like a palmetto bug. Over by that shelf."

The senior inspector adjusted his respirator more snugly over his face and motioned to his assistant to do the same. He advanced slowly toward the shelf, unfastening a second nozzle from the pressure tank on his back. He turned it on, and a cloud of greenish gas sprayed out.

"There," the senior inspector said. "That should take care of your bug." He knelt down and looked under the shelf. "Nothing here."

"It was probably a shadow," the assistant said.

Together they sprayed the entire interior of the ship, paying particular attention to the small box of Martian artifacts. They left the gas-filled ship and dogged the hatch again.

"Now what?" the assistant asked.

"Now we leave the ship sealed for three days," the senior inspector said. "Then we inspect again. You find me the animal that'll live through that."

THE Quedak, who had been clinging to the underside of the assistant's shoe between the heel and the sole, released his hold. He watched the shadowy biped figures move away, talking in their deep, rumbling, indecipherable voices. He felt tired and unutterably lonely.

But buoying him up was the thought of the Quedak mission. Only that was important. The first part of the mission was accom-

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plished. He had landed safely on an inhabited planet. Now he needed food and drink. Then he had to have rest, a great deal of rest to restore his dormant faculties. After that he would be ready to give this world what it so obviously needed — the cooperation possible only through the Quedak mind.

He crept slowly down the shadowy yard, past the deserted hulls of spaceships. He came to a wire fence and sensed the high-voltage electricity running through it. Gauging his distance carefully, the Quedak jumped safely through one of the openings in the mesh.

This was a very different section. From here the Quedak could smell water and food. He moved hastily forward, then stopped.

He sensed the presence of a man. And something else. Something much more menacing.

"WHO'S THERE?" the watchman called out. He waited, his revolver in one hand, his flashlight in the other. Thieves had broken into the yards last week; they had stolen three cases of computer parts bound for Rio. Tonight he was ready for them.

He walked forward, an old, keen-eyed man holding his revolver in a rock-steady fist. The beam of his flashlight probed among the cargoes. The yellow light flickered along a great pile of precision machine tools for South Africa, past a water-extraction plant for Jordan and a pile of mixed goods for Rabaul.

"You better come out," the watchman shouted. His flashlight probed at sacks of rice for Shanghai and power saws for Burma. Then the beam of light stopped abruptly.

"I'll be damned," the watchman said. Then he laughed. A huge and red-eyed rat was glaring into the beam of his flashlight. It had something in its jaws, something that looked like an unusually large cockroach.

"Good eating," the watchman said. He holstered his revolver and continued his patrol.

A large black animal had seized the Quedak, and he felt heavy jaws close over his back. He tried to fight; but, blinded by a sudden beam of yellow light, he was betrayed by total and enervating confusion.

The yellow light went off. The black beast bit down hard on the Quedak's armored back. The Quedak mustered his remaining strength, and, uncoiling his long, scorpion-jointed tail, lashed out.

He missed, but the black beast released him hastily. They circled each other, the Quedak hoisting his tail for a second blow, the beast unwilling to turn loose this prey.

The Quedak waited for his chance. Elation filled him. This

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pugnacious animal could be the first, the first on this planet to experience the Quedak mission. From this humble creature a start could be made. . . .

The beast sprang and its white teeth clicked together viciously. The Quedak moved out of the way and its barb-headed tail flashed out, fastening itself in the beast's back. The Quedak held on grimly while the beast leaped and squirmed. Setting his feet, the Quedak concentrated on the all-important task of pumping a tiny white crystal down the length of his tail and under the beast's skin.

But this most important of the Quedak faculties was still dormant. Unable to accomplish anything, the Quedak released his barbs, and, taking careful aim, accurately drove his sting home between the black beast's eyes. The blow, as the Quedak had known, was lethal.

The Quedak took nourishment from the body of its dead foe; regretfully, for by inclination the Quedak was herbivorous. When he had finished, the Quedak knew that he was in desperate need of a long period of rest. Only after that could the full Quedak powers be regained.

He crawled up and down the piles of goods in the yard, looking for a place to hide. Carefully he examined several bales. At last he reached a stack of heavy boxes. One of the boxes had a crack just large enough to admit him.

The Quedak crawled inside, down the shiny, oil-slick surface of a machine, to the far end of the box. There he went into the dreamless, defenseless sleep of the Quedak, serenely trusting in what the future would bring.

PART TWO

I

THE big gaff-headed schooner was pointed directly at the reef-enclosed island, moving toward it with the solidity of an express train. The sails billowed under powerful gusts of the northwest breeze, and the rusty Allison-Chambers diesel rumbled beneath a teak grating. The skipper and mate stood on the bridge deck and watched the reef approach.

"Anything yet?" the skipper asked. He was a stocky, balding man with a perpetual frown on his face. He had been sailing his schooner among the uncharted shoals and reefs of the Southwest Pacific for twenty-five years. He frowned because his old ship was not insurable. His deck cargo, however, *was* insured. Some of it had come all the way from Ogdensville, that transshipment center in the desert where spaceships landed.

"Not a thing," the mate said. He was watching the dazzling white wall of coral, looking for the gleam

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of blue that would reveal the narrow pass to the inner lagoon. This was his first trip to the Solomon Islands. A former television repairman in Sydney before he got the wanderlust, the mate wondered if the skipper had gone crazy and planned a spectacular suicide against the reef.

"Still nothing!" he shouted. "Shoals ahead!"

"I'll take it," the skipper said to the helmsman. He gripped the wheel and watched the unbroken face on the reef.

"Nothing," the mate said. "Skipper, we'd better come about."

"Not if we're going to get through the pass," the skipper said. He was beginning to get worried. But he had promised to deliver goods to the American treasure-hunters on this island, and the skipper's word was his bond. He had picked up the cargo in Rabaul and made his usual stops at the settlements on New Georgia and Malaita. When he finished here, he could look forward to a thousand-mile run to New Caledonia.

"There it is!" the mate shouted.

A thin slit of blue had appeared in the coral wall. They were less than thirty yards from it now, and the old schooner was making close to eight knots.

AS the ship entered the pass, the skipper threw the wheel hard over. The schooner spun on its keel. Coral flashed by on either side, close enough to touch. There was a metallic shriek as an upper mainmast spreader snagged and came free. Then they were in the pass, bucking a six-knot current.

The mate pushed the diesel to full throttle, then sprang back to help the skipper wrestle with the wheel. Under sail and power the schooner forged through the pass, scraped by an outcropping to port, and came onto the placid surface of the lagoon.

The skipper mopped his forehead with a large blue bandanna. "Very snug work," he said.

"*Snug!*" the mate cried. He turned away, and the skipper smiled a brief smile.

They slid past a small ketch riding at anchor. The native hands took down sail and the schooner nosed up to a rickety pier that jutted out from the beach. Lines were made fast to palm trees. From the fringe of jungle above the beach a white man came down, walking briskly in the noonday heat.

He was very tall and thin, with knobby knees and elbows. The fierce Melanesian sun had burned out but not tanned him, and his nose and cheekbones were peeling. His horn-rimmed glasses had broken at the hinge and been repaired with a piece of tape. He looked eager, boyish, and curiously naive.

One hell-of-a-looking treasure-hunter, the mate thought.

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"Glad to see you!" the man called out. "We'd about given you up for lost."

"Not likely," the skipper said. "Mr. Sorensen, I'd like you to meet my new mate, Mr. Willis."

"Glad to meet you, Professor," the mate said.

"I'm not a professor," Sorensen said, "but thanks anyhow."

"Where are the others?" the skipper asked.

"Out in the jungle," Sorensen said. "All except Drake, and he'll be down here shortly. You'll stay a while, won't you?"

"Only to unload," the skipper said. "Have to catch the tide out of here. How's the treasure-hunting?"

"We've done a lot of digging," Sorensen said. "We still have our hopes."

"But no doubloons yet?" the skipper asked. "No pieces of eight?"

"Not a damned one," Sorensen said wearily. "Did you bring the newspapers, Skipper?"

"That I did," Sorenson replied. "They're in the cabin. Did you hear about that second spaceship going to Mars?"

"Heard about it on the short wave," Sorensen said. "It didn't bring back much, did it?"

"Practically nothing. Still, just think of it. *Two* spaceships to Mars, and I hear they're getting ready to put one on Venus."

The three men looked around them and grinned.

"Well," the skipper said, "I guess maybe the space age hasn't reached the Southwest Pacific yet. And it certainly hasn't gotten to *this* place. Come on, let's unload the cargo."

THIS place was the island of Vuanu, southernmost of the Solomons, almost in the Louisade Archipelago. It was a fair-sized volcanic island, almost twenty miles long and several wide. Once it had supported half a dozen native villages. But the population had begun to decline after the depredations of the blackbirders in the 1850s. Then a measles epidemic wiped out almost all the rest, and the survivors emigrated to New Georia. A ship-watcher had been stationed here during the Second World War, but no ships had come this way. The Japanese invasion had poured across New Guinea and the upper Solomons, and further north through Micronesia. At the end of the war Vuanu was still deserted. It was not made into a bird sanctuary like Canton Island, or a cable station like Christmas Island, or a refueling point like Cocos-Keeling. No one even wanted to explode alphabet bombs on it. Vuanu was a worthless, humid, jungle-covered piece of land, free to anyone who wanted it.

William Sorensen, general manager of a chain of liquor stores in California, decided he wanted it.

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Sorensen's hobby was treasure-hunting. He had looked for Lafitte's treasure in Louisiana and Texas, and for the Lost Dutchman Mine in Arizona. He had found neither. His luck had been better on the wreck-strewn Gulf coast, and on an expedition to Dagger Cay in the Caribbean he had found a double handful of Spanish coins in a rotting canvas bag. The coins were worth about three thousands dollars. The expedition had cost very much more, but Sorensen felt amply repaid.

For many years he had been interested in the Spanish treasure galleon *Santa Teresa*. Contemporary accounts told how the ship, heavily laden with bullion, sailed from Manila in 1689. The clumsy ship, caught in a storm, had run off to the south and been wrecked. Eighteen survivors managed to get ashore with the treasure. They buried it, and set sail for the Phillipines in the ship's pinnacle. Two of them were alive when the boat reached Manila.

The treasure island was tentatively identified as one of the Solomons. But which one?

No one knew. Treasure-hunters looked for the cache on Bougainville and Buka. There was a rumor about it on Malaita, and even Ontong Java received an expedition. But no treasure was recovered.

Sorensen, researching the problem thoroughly, decided that the *Santa Teresa* had sailed completely through the Solomons, almost to the Louisades. The ship must have escaped destruction until it crashed into the reef at Vuanu.

His desire to search for the treasure might have remained only a dream if he hadn't met Dan Drake. Drake was also an amateur treasure-hunter. More important, he owned a fifty-five-foot Hanna ketch.

Over an evening's drinks the Vuanu expedition was born.

Additional members were recruited. Drake's ketch was put into seagoing condition, equipment and money saved or gathered. Several other possible treasure sites in the Southwest Pacific were researched. Finally, vacation time was synchronized and the expedition got under way.

They had put in three months' work on Vuanu already. Their morale was high, in spite of inevitable conflicts between members. This schooner, bringing in supplies from Sydney and Rabaul, was the last civilized contact they would have for another six months.

WHILE Sorensen nervously supervised, the crew of the schooner unloaded the cargo. He didn't want any of the equipment, some of it shipped over six thousand miles, to be broken now. No replacements were possible; whatever they didn't have, they would

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have to do without. He breathed out in relief when the last crate, containing a metals detector, was safely hoisted over the side and put on the beach above the high-water mark.

There was something odd about that box. He examined it and found a quarter-sized hole in one end. It had not been properly sealed.

Dan Drake, the co-manager of the expedition, joined him. "What's wrong?" Drake asked.

"Hole in that crate," Sorensen said. "Salt water might have gotten in. We'll be in tough shape if this detector doesn't work."

Drake nodded. "We better open it and see." He was a short, deeply tanned, broad-chested man with close-cropped black hair and a straggly mustache. He wore an old yachting cap jammed down over his eyes, giving his face a tough bulldog look. He pulled a big screwdriver from his belt and inserted it into the crack.

"Wait a moment," Sorensen said. "Let's get it up to the camp first. Easier to carry the crate than something packed in grease."

"Right," Drake said. "Take the other end."

The camp was built in a clearing a hundred yards from the beach, on the site of an abandoned native village. They had been able to rethatch several huts, and there was an old copra shed with a galvanized iron roof where they stored their supplies. Here they got the benefit of any breeze from the sea. Beyond the clearing, the gray-green jungle sprang up like a solid wall.

Sorensen and Drake set the case down. The skipper, who had accompanied them with the newspapers, looked around at the bleak huts and shook his head.

"Would you like a drink, Skipper?" Sorensen asked. "Afraid we can't offer any ice."

"A drink would be fine," the skipper said. He wondered what drove men to a godforsaken place like this in search of imaginary Spanish treasure.

Sorensen went into one of the huts and brought out a bottle of Scotch and a tin cup. Drake had taken out his screwdriver and was vigorously ripping boards off the crate.

"How does it look?" Sorensen asked.

"It's OK," Drake said, gently lifting out the metals detector. "Heavily greased. Doesn't seem like there was any damage —"

He jumped back. The skipper had come forward and stamped down heavily on the sand.

"What's the matter?" Sorensen asked.

"Looked like a scorpion," the skipper said. "Damned thing crawled right out of your crate there. Might have bit you."

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SORENSEN shrugged. He had gotten used to the presence of an infinite number of insects during his three months on Vuanu. Another bug more or less didn't seem to make much difference.

"Another drink?" he asked.

"Can't do it," the skipper said regretfully. "I'd better get started. All your party healthy?"

"All healthy so far," Sorensen said. He smiled. "Except for some bad cases of gold fever."

"You'll never find gold in this place," the skipper said seriously. "I'll look in on you in about six months. Good luck."

After shaking hands, the skipper went down to the beach and boarded his ship. As the first pink flush of sunset touched the sky, the schooner was under way. Sorensen and Drake watched it negotiate the pass. For a few minutes its masts were visible above the reef. Then they had dipped below the horizon.

"That's that," Drake said. "Us crazy American treasure-hunters are alone again."

"You don't think he suspected anything?" Sorensen asked.

"Definitely not. As far as he's concerned, we're just crackpots."

Grinning, they looked back at their camp. Under the copra shed was nearly fifty thousand dollars worth of gold and silver bullion, dug out of the jungle and carefully reburied. They had located a part of the *Santa Teresa* treasure during their first month on the island. There was every indication of more to come. Since they had no legal title to the land, the expedition was not eager to let the news get out. Once it was known, every gold-hungry vagabond from Perth to Papeete would be heading to Vuanu.

"The boy'll be in soon," Drake said. "Let's get some stew going."

"Right," Sorensen said. He took a few steps and stopped. "That's funny."

"What is?"

"That scorpion the skipper squashed. It's gone."

"Maybe he missed it," Drake said. "Or maybe he just pushed it down into the sand. What difference does it make?"

"None, I guess," Sorensen said.

II

EDWARD EAKINS walked through the jungle with a long-handled spade on his shoulder, sucking reflectively on a piece of candy. It was the first he'd had in weeks, and he was enjoying it to the utmost. He was in very good spirits. The schooner yesterday had brought in not only machinery and replacement parts, but also candy, cigarettes and food. He had eaten scrambled eggs this morning, and real bacon. The expedition was becoming almost civilized.

Something rustled in the bushes

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near him. He marched on, ignoring it.

He was a lean, sandy-haired man, amiable and slouching, with pale blue eyes and an unprepossessing manner. He felt very lucky to have been taken on the expedition. His gas station didn't put him on a financial par with the others, and he hadn't been able to put up a full share of the money. He still felt guilty about that. He had been accepted because he was an eager and indefatigable treasure-hunter with a good knowledge of jungle ways. Equally important, he was a skilled radio operator and repairman. He had kept the transmitter on the ketch in working condition in spite of salt water and mildew.

He could pay his full share now, of course. But *now*, when they were practically rich, didn't really count. He wished there were some way he could —

There was that rustle in the bushes again.

Eakins stopped and waited. The bushes trembled. And out stepped a mouse.

Eakins was amazed. The mice on this island, like most wild animal life, were terrified of man. Although they feasted off the refuse of the camp — when the rats didn't get it first — they carefully avoided any contact with humans.

"You better get yourself home," Eakins said to the mouse.

The mouse stared at him. He stared back. It was a pretty little mouse, no more than four or five inches long, and colored a light tawny brown. It didn't seem afraid.

"So long, mouse," Eakins said. "I got work to do." He shifted his spade to the other shoulder and turned to go. As he turned, he caught a flash of brown out of the corner of his eye. Instinctively he ducked. The mouse whirled past him, turned, and gathered itself for another leap.

"Mouse, are you out of your head?" Eakins asked.

The mouse bared its tiny teeth and sprang. Eakins knocked it aside.

"Now get the hell out of here," he said. He was beginning to wonder if the rodent was crazy. Did it have rabies, perhaps?

The mouse gathered itself for another charge. Eakins lifted the spade off his shoulders and waited. When the mouse sprang, he met it with a carefully timed blow. Then carefully, regretfully, he battered it to death.

"Can't have rabid mice running around," he said.

But the mouse hadn't seemed rabid; it had just seemed very determined.

Eakins scratched his head. Now what, he wondered, had gotten into that little mouse?

In the camp that evening, Eakins' story was greeted with hoots of laughter. It was just like

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Eakins to be attacked by a mouse. Several men suggested that he go armed in case the mouse's family wanted revenge. Eakins just smiled sheepishly.

TWO days later, Sorensen and Al Cable were finishing up a morning's hard work at Site 4, two miles from the camp. The metals detector had shown marked activity at this spot. They were seven feet down and nothing had been produced yet except a high mound of yellow-brown earth.

"That detector must be wrong," Cable said, wiping his face wearily. He was a big, pinkish man. He had sweated off twenty pounds on Vuanu, picked up a bad case of prickly heat, and had enough treasure-hunting to last him a lifetime. He wished he were back in Baltimore taking care of his used-car agency. He didn't hesitate to say so, often and loudly. He was one member who had not worked out well.

"Nothing wrong with the detector," Sorensen said. "Trouble is, we're digging in swampy ground. The cache must have sunk."

"It's probably a hundred feet down," Cable said, stabbing angrily at the gluey mud.

"Nope," Sorensen said. "There's volcanic rock under us, no more than twenty feet down."

"Twenty feet? We should have a bulldozer."

"Might be costly bringing one in," Sorensen said mildly. "Come on, Al, let's get back to camp."

Sorensen helped Cable out of the excavation. They cleaned off their tools and started toward the narrow path leading back to the camp. They stopped abruptly.

A large, ugly bird had stepped out of the brush. It was standing on the path, blocking their way.

"What in hell is that?" Cable asked.

"A cassowary," Sorensen said.

"Well, let's boot it out of the way and get going."

"Take it easy," Sorensen said. "If anyone does any booting, it'll be the bird. Back away slowly."

The cassowary was nearly five feet high, a black-feathered ostrich-like bird standing erect on powerful legs. Each of its feet was three-toed, and the toes curved into heavy talons. It had a yellowish, bony head and short, useless wings. From its neck hung a brilliant wattle colored red, green, and purple.

"It is dangerous?" Cable asked.

Sorensen nodded. "Natives on New Guinea have been kicked to death by those birds."

"Why haven't we seen it before?" Cable asked.

"They're usually very shy," Sorensen said. "They stay as far from people as they can."

"This one sure isn't shy," Cable said, as the cassowary took a step toward them. "Can we run?"

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"The bird can run a lot faster," Sorensen said. "I don't suppose you have a gun with you?"

"Of course not. There's been nothing to shoot."

BACKING away, they held their spades like spears. The brush crackled and an anteater emerged. It was followed by a wild pig. The three beasts converged on the men, backing them toward the dense wall of the jungle.

"They're herding us," Cable said, his voice going shrill.

"Take it easy," Sorensen said. "The cassowary is the only one we have to watch out for."

"Aren't anteaters dangerous?"

"Only to ants."

"The hell you say," Cable said. "Bill, the animals on this island have gone crazy. Remember Eakins' mouse?"

"I remember it," Sorensen said. They had reached the far edge of the clearing. The beasts were in front of them, still advancing, with the cassowary in the center. Behind them lay the jungle — and whatever they were being herded toward.

"We'll have to make a break for it," Sorensen said.

"That damned bird is blocking the trail."

"We'll have to knock him over," Sorensen said. "Watch out for his feet. Let's go!"

They raced toward the cassowary, swinging their spades. The cassowary hesitated, unable to make up its mind between targets. Then it turned toward Cable and its right leg lashed out. The partially deflected blow sounded like the flat of a meat cleaver against a side of beef. Cable grunted and collapsed, clutching his ribs.

Sorensen stabbed, and the honed edge of his spade nearly severed the cassowary's head from its body. The wild pig and the anteater were coming at him now. He flailed with his spade, driving them back. Then, with a strength he hadn't known he possessed, he stooped, lifted Cable across his shoulders and ran down the path.

A quarter of a mile down he had to stop, completely out of breath. There were no sounds behind him. The other animals were apparently not following. He went back to the wounded man.

Cable had begun to recover consciousness. He was able to walk, half-supported by Sorensen. When they reached the camp, Sorensen called everybody in for a meeting. He counted heads while Eakins taped up Cable's side. Only one man was missing.

"Where's Drake?" Sorensen asked.

"He's across the island at North Beach, fishing," said Tom Recetich. "Want me to get him?"

Sorensen hesitated. Finally he said, "No. I'd better explain what

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we're up against. Then we'll issue the guns. *Then* we'll try to find Drake."

"Man, what's going on?" Recetich asked.

Sorensen began to explain what had happened at Site 4.

FISHING provided an important part of the expedition's food and there was no work Drake liked better. At first he had gone out with face mask and spear gun. But the sharks in this corner of the world were numerous, hungry and aggressive. So, regretfully, he had given up skin diving and set out handlines on the leeward side of the island.

The lines were out now, and Drake lay in the shade of a palm tree, half asleep, his big forearms folded over his chest. His dog, Oro, was prowling the beach in search of hermit crabs. Oro was a good-natured mutt, part airdale, part terrier, part unknown. He was growling at something now.

"Leave the crabs alone," Drake called out. "You'll just get nipped again."

Oro was still growling. Drake rolled over and saw that the dog was standing stiff-legged over a large insect. It looked like some kind of scorpion.

"Oro, leave that blasted —"

Before Drake could move, the insect sprang. It landed on Oro's neck and the jointed tail whipped out. Oro yelped once. Drake was on his feet instantly. He swatted at the bug, but it jumped off the dog's neck and scuttled into the brush.

"Take it easy, old boy," Drake said. "That's a nasty-looking wound. Might be poisoned. I better open it up."

He held the panting dog firmly and drew his boat knife. He had operated on the dog for snake bite in Central America, and in the Adirondacks he had held him down and pulled porcupine quills out of his mouth with a pair of pliers. The dog always knew he was being helped. He never struggled.

This time, the dog bit.

"Oro!" Drake grabbed the dog at the jaw hinge with his free hand. He brought pressure to bear, paralyzing the muscles, forcing the dog's jaws open. He pulled his hand out and flung the dog away. Oro rolled to his feet and advanced on him again.

"Stand!" Drake shouted. The dog kept coming, edging around to get between the ocean and the man.

Turning, Drake saw the bug emerge from the jungle and creep toward him. His dog had circled around and was trying to drive him toward the bug.

Drake didn't know what was going on, and he decided he'd better not stay to find out. He picked up his knife and threw it at

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the bug. He missed. The bug was almost within jumping distance.

Drake ran toward the ocean. When Oro tried to intercept him, he kicked the dog out of the way and plunged into the water.

He began to swim around the island to the camp, hoping he'd make it before the sharks got him.

III

AT the camp, rifles and revolvers were hastily wiped clean of cosmoline and passed around. Binoculars were taken out and adjusted. Cartridges were divided up, and the supply of knives, machetes and hatchets quickly disappeared. The expedition's two walkie-talkies were unpacked, and the men prepared to move out in search of Drake. Then they saw him, swimming vigorously around the edge of the island.

He waded ashore, tired but uninjured. He and the others put their information together and reached some unhappy conclusions.

"Do you mean to say," Cable demanded, "that a *bug* is doing all this?"

"It looks that way," Sorensen said. "We have to assume that it's able to exercise some kind of thought control. Maybe hypnotic or telepathic."

"It has to sting first," Drake said. "That's what it did with Oro."

"I just can't imagine a scorpion doing all that," Recetich said.

"It's not a scorpion," Drake said. "I saw it close up. It's got a tail like a scorpion, but its head is damn near four times as big, and its body is different. Up close, it doesn't look like anything you ever saw before."

"Do you think it's native to this island?" asked Monty Byrnes, a treasure-seeker from Indianapolis.

"I doubt it," Drake said. "If it is, why did it leave us and the animals alone for three months?"

"That's right," Sorensen said. "All our troubles began just after the schooner came. The schooner must have brought it from somewhere. . . . Hey!"

"What is it?" Drake asked.

"Remember that scorpion the skipper tried to squash? It came out of the detector crate. Do you think it could be the same one?"

Drake shrugged his shoulders. "Could be. Seems to me our problem right now isn't finding out where it came from. We have to figure out what to do about it."

"If it can control animals," Byrnes said, "I wonder if it can control men."

THEY were all silent. They had moved into a circle near the copra shed, and while they talked they watched the jungle for any sign of insect or animal life.

Sorensen said, "We'd better radio for help."

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"If we do that," Recetich said, "somebody's going to find out about the *Santa Teresa* treasure. We'll be overrun in no time."

"Maybe so," Sorensen said. "But at the worst, we've cleared expenses. We've even made a small profit."

"And if we don't get help," Drake said, "we may be in no condition to take anything out of here."

"The problem isn't as bad as all that," Byrnes said. "We've got guns. We can take care of the animals."

"You haven't seen the bug yet," Drake said.

"We'll squash it."

"That won't be easy," Drake said. "It's faster than hell. And how are you going to squash it if it comes into your hut some night while you're asleep? We could post guards and they wouldn't even see the thing."

Brynes shuddered involuntarily. "Yeah, I guess you're right. Maybe we'd better radio for help."

Eakins stood up. "Well, gents," he said, "I guess that means me. I just hope the batteries on the ketch are up to charge."

"It'll be dangerous going out there," Drake said. "We'll draw lots."

Eakins was amused. "We will? How many of you can operate a transmitter?"

Drake said, "I can."

"No offense meant," Eakins said, "but you don't operate that set of yours worth a damn. You don't even know Morse for key transmission. And can you fix the set if it goes out?"

"No," Drake said. But the whole thing is too risky. We all should go."

Eakins shook his head. "Safest thing all around is if you cover me from the beach. That bug probably hasn't thought about the ketch yet."

Eakins stuck a tool kit in his pocket and strapped one of the camp's walkie-talkies over his shoulder. He handed the other one to Sorensen. He hurried down the beach past the launch and pushed the small dinghy into the water. The men of the expedition spread out, their rifles ready. Eakins got into the dinghy and started rowing across the quiet lagoon.

They saw him tie up to the ketch and pause a moment, looking around. Then he climbed aboard. Quickly he slid back the hatch and went inside.

"Everything all right?" Sorensen asked.

"No trouble yet," Eakins said, his voice sounding thin and sharp over the walkie-talkie. "I'm at the transmitter now, turning it on. It needs a couple of minutes to warm up."

Drake nudged Sorensen. "Look over there."

On the reef, almost hidden by the ketch, something was moving. Using binoculars, Sorensen could

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see three big gray rats slipping into the water. They began swimming toward the ketch.

"Start firing!" Sorensen said. "Eakins, get out of there!"

"I've got the transmitter going," Eakins said. "I just need a couple of minutes more to get a message off."

BULLETS sent up white splashes around the swimming rats. One was hit; the other two managed to put the ketch between them and the riflemen. Studying the reef with his binoculars, Sorensen saw an anteater cross the reef and splash into the water. It was followed by a wild pig.

There was a crackle of static from the walkie-talkie. Sorensen called, "Eakins, have you got that message off?"

"Haven't sent it," Eakins called back. "Listen, Bill. We *mustn't* send any messages! That bug wants —" He stopped abruptly.

"What is it?" Sorensen asked. "What's happening?"

Eakins had appeared on deck, still holding the walkie-talkie. He was backing toward the stern.

"Hermit crabs," he said. "They climbed up the anchor line. I'm going to swim to shore."

"Don't do it," Sorensen said.

"Gotta do it," Eakins said. "They'll probably follow me. All of you come out here and *get that transmitter*. Bring it ashore."

Through his binoculars, Sorensen could see a solid gray carpet of hermit crabs crawling down the deck and waterways of the ketch. Eakins jumped into the water. He swam furiously toward shore, and Sorensen saw the rats turn and follow him. Hermit crabs swarmed off the boat, and the wild pig and the anteater paddled after him, trying to head him off before he reached the beach.

"Come on," Sorensen said. "I don't know what Eakins figured out, but we better get that transmitter while we have a chance."

They ran down the beach and put the launch into the water. Two hundred yards away, Eakins had reached the far edge of the beach with the animals in close pursuit. He broke into the jungle, still clinging to his walkie-talkie.

"Eakins?" Sorensen asked into the walkie-talkie.

"I'm all right," Eakins said, panting hard for air. "Get that transmitter, and don't forget the batteries!"

The men boarded the ketch. Working furiously, they ripped the transmitter off its bulkhead and dragged it up the companionway steps. Drake came last, carrying a twelve-volt battery. He went down again and brought up a second battery. He hesitated a moment, then went below for a third time.

"Drake!" Sorensen shouted. "Quit holding us up!"

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MEETING OF THE MINDS

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Drake reappeared, carrying the ketch's two radio direction finders and the compass. He handed them down and jumped into the launch.

"OK," he said. "Let's go."

THEY rowed to the beach. Sorensen was tryin to re-establish contact with Eakins on the walkie-talkie, but all he could hear was static. Then, as the launch grounded on the beach, he heard Eakins' voice.

"I'm surrounded," he said, very quietly. "I guess I'll have to see what Mr. Bug wants. Maybe I can swat him first, though."

There was a long silence. Then Eakins said, "It's coming toward me now. Drake was right. It sure isn't like any bug *I've* ever seen. I'm going to swat hell out of —"

They heard him scream, more in surprise than pain.

Sorensen said, "Eakins, can you hear me? Where are you? Can we help?"

"It sure *is* fast," Eakins said, his voice conversational again. "Fastest damned bug I've ever seen. Jumped on my neck, stung me and jumped off again."

"How do you feel?" Sorensen asked.

"Fine," Eakins said. "Hardly felt the sting."

"Where is the bug now?"

"Back in the bush."

"The animals?"

"They went away. You know," Eakins said, "maybe this thing doesn't work on humans. Maybe—"

"What?" Sorensen asked. "What's happening now?"

There was a long silence. Then Eakins' voice, low-pitched and calm, came over the walkie-talkie.

"We'll speak with you again later," Eakins said. "We must take consultation now and decide what to do with you."

"Eakins!"

There was no answer from the other end of the walkie-talkie.

IV

RETURNING to their camp, the men were in a mood of thorough depression. They couldn't understand what had happened to Eakins and they didn't feel like speculating on it. The ravaging afternoon sun beat down, reflecting heat back from the white sand. The damp jungle steamed, and appeared to creep toward them like a huge and sleepy green dragon, trapping them against the indifferent sea. Gun barrels grew too hot to touch, and the water in the canteens was as warm as blood. Overhead, thick gray cumulus clouds began to pile up; it was the beginning of the monsoon season.

Drake sat in the shade of the copra shed. He shook off his lethargy long enough to inspect the camp from the viewpoint of defense. He saw the encircling jungle

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as enemy territory. In front of it was an area fifty yards deep which they had cleared. This no man's land could perhaps be defended for a while.

Then came the huts and the copra shed, their last line of defense, leading to the beach and the sea.

The expedition had been in complete control of this island for better than three months. Now they were pinned to a small and precarious beachhead.

Drake glanced at the lagoon behind him and remembered that there was still one line of retreat open. If the bug and his damned menagerie pressed too hard, they could still escape in the ketch. With luck.

Sorensen came over and sat down beside him. "What are you doing?" he asked.

Drake grinned sourly. "Planning our master strategy."

"How does it look?"

"I think we can hold out," Drake said. "We've got plenty of ammo. If necessary, we'll interdict the cleared area with gasoline. We certainly aren't going to let that bug push us off the island." He thought for a moment. "But it's going to be damned hard digging for treasure."

Sorensen nodded. "I wonder what the bug wants."

"Maybe we'll find out from Eakins," Drake said.

THEY had to wait half an hour. Then Eakins' voice came, sharp and shrill over the walkie-talkie.

"Sorensen? Drake?"

"We're here," Drake said. "What did that damned bug do to you?"

"Nothing," Eakins said. "You are talking to that bug now. My name is the Quedak."

"My God," Drake said to Sorensen, "that bug must have hypnotized him!"

"No. You are not speaking to a hypnotized Eakins. Nor are you speaking to a creature who is simply using Eakins as a mouthpiece. Nor are you speaking to the Eakins who was. You are speaking to many individuals who are one."

"I don't get that," Drake said.

"It's very simple," Eakins' voice replied. "I am the Quedak, the totality. But my totality is made up of separate parts, which are Eakins, several rats, a dog named Oro, a pig, an anteater, a cassowary—"

"Hold on," Sorensen said. "Let me get this straight. This is *not* Eakins I'm speaking to. This is the — the Quedak?"

"That is correct."

"And you control Eakins and the others? You speak through Eakins' mouth?"

"Also correct. But that doesn't mean that the personalities of the others are obliterated. Quite the contrary, the Quedak state is a federation in which the various

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member parts retain their idiosyncrasies, their individual needs and desires. They give their knowledge, their power, their special outlook to the Quedak whole. The Quedak is the coordinating and command center; but the individual parts supply the knowledge, the insights, the special skills. And together we form the Great Cooperation."

"Cooperation?" Drake said. "But you did all this by force!"

"It was necessary in the beginning. Otherwise, how would other creatures have known about the Great Cooperation?"

"Would they stay if you released your control over them?" Drake asked.

"That is a meaningless question. We form a single indivisible entity now. Would your arm return to you if you cut it off?"

"It isn't the same thing."

"It is," Eakins' voice said. "We are a single organism. We are still growing. And we welcome you wholeheartedly into the Great Cooperation."

"To hell with that," Drake said.

"But you must join," the Quedak told them. "It is the Quedak Mission to coordinate all sentient creatures into a single collective organism. Believe me, there is only the most trifling loss of the individuality you prize so highly. And you gain so much more! You learn the viewpoints and special knowledge of all other creatures. Within the Quedak framework you can fully realize your potentialities—"

"No!"

"I am sorry," the Quedak said. "The Quedak Mission must be fulfilled. You will not join us willingly?"

"Never," Drake said.

"Then *we* will join *you*," the Quedak said.

There was a click as he turned off the walkie-talkie.

FROM the fringe of the jungle, several rats appeared. They hesitated, just out of rifle range. A bird of paradise flew overhead, hovering over the cleared area like an observation plane. As the men watched, the rats began to run forward in long zigzags.

"Start firing," Drake called out. "But go easy with the ammo."

The men began to fire. But it was difficult to sight on the quick-moving rats against the grayish-brown clearing. And almost immediately, the rats were joined by a dozen hermit crabs. They had an uncanny knack for moving when no one was watching them, darting forward, then freezing against the neutral background.

They saw Eakins appear on the fringe of the jungle.

"Lousy traitor," Cable said, raising his rifle.

Sorensen slapped the muzzle of the rifle aside. "Don't do it."

"But he's helping that bug!"

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"He can't help it," Sorensen said. "And he's not armed. Leave him alone."

Eakins watched for a few moments, then melted back into the jungle.

The attack by the rats and crabs swept across half of the cleared space. Then, as they came closer, the men were able to pick their targets with more accuracy. Nothing was able to get closer than twenty yards. And when Recetich shot down the bird of paradise, the attack began to falter.

"You know," Drake said, "I think we're going to be all right."

"Could be," said Sorensen. "I don't understand what the Quedak is trying to accomplish. He knows we can't be taken like this. I should think—"

"Hey!" one of the men called out. "Our boat!"

They turned and saw why the Quedak had ordered the attack. While it had occupied their attention, Drake's dog had swum out to the ketch and gnawed through the anchor line. Unattended, the ketch was drifting before the wind, moving toward the reef. They saw it bump gently, then harder. In a moment it was heeled hard over, stuck in the coral.

There was a burst of static from the walkie-talkie. Sorensen held it up and heard the Quedak say, "The ketch isn't seriously damaged. It's simply immobilized."

"The hell you say," Drake growled. "For all you know, it's got a whole punched right through it. How do you plan on getting off the island, Quedak? Or are you just going to stay here?"

"I will leave at the proper time," the Quedak said. "I want to make sure that we all leave together."

V

THE wind died. Huge gray thunderheads piled up in the sky to the southeast, their tops lost in the upper atmosphere, their black anvil bottoms pressing the hot still air upon the island. The sun had lost its fiery glare. Cherry-red, it slid listlessly toward the flat sea.

High overhead, a single bird of paradise circled, just out of rifle range. It had gone up ten minutes after Recetich had shot the first one down.

Monty Byrnes stood on the edge of the cleared area, his rifle ready. He had drawn the first guard shift. The rest of the men were eating a hasty dinner inside the copra shed. Sorensen and Drake were outside, looking over the situation.

Drake said, "By nightfall we'll have to pull everybody back into the shed. Can't take a chance on being exposed to the Quedak in the dark."

Sorensen nodded. He seemed to have aged ten years in a day's time.

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"In the morning," Drake said, "we'll be able to work something out. We'll . . . What's wrong, Bill?"

"Do you really think we have a chance?" Sorensen asked.

"Sure we do. We've got a damned good chance."

"Be realistic," Sorensen said. "The longer this goes on, the more animals the Quedak can throw against us. What can we do about it?"

"Hunt him out and kill him."

"The damned thing is about the size of your thumb," Sorensen said irritably. "How can we hunt him?"

"We'll figure out something," Drake said. He was beginning to get worried about Sorensen. The morale among the men was low enough without Sorensen pushing it down further.

"I wish someone would shoot that damned bird," Sorensen said, glancing overhead.

About every fifteen minutes, the bird of paradise came darting down for a closer look at the camp. Then, before the guard had a chance to fire, he swept back up to a safe altitude.

"It's getting on my nerves, too," Drake said. "Maybe that's what it's supposed to do. One of these times we'll—"

He stopped abruptly. From the copra shed he could hear the loud hum of a radio. And he heard Al Cable saying, "Hello, hello, this is Vuanu calling. We need help."

Drake and Sorensen went into the shed. Cable was sitting in front of the transmitter, saying into the microphone, "Emergency, emergency, Vuanu calling, we need—"

"What in hell do you think you're doing?" Drake snapped.

CABLE turned and looked at him, his pudgy pink body streaked with sweat. "I'm radioing for help, that's what I'm doing. I think I've picked up somebody. But they haven't answered me yet."

He readjusted the tuning. Over the receiver, they could hear a bored British voice saying, "Pawn to Queen four, eh? Why don't you ever try a different opening?"

There was a sharp burst of static. "Just move," a deep bass voice answered. "Just shut up and move."

"Sure," said the British voice. "Knight to king bishop three."

Drake recognized the voices. They were ham radio operators. One of them owned a plantation on Bougainville; the other was a shopkeeper in Rabaul. They came on the air for an hour of chess and argument every evening.

Cable tapped the microphone impatiently. "Hello," he said, "this is Vuanu calling, emergency call—"

Drake walked over and took the microphone out of Cable's hand. He put it down carefully.

"We can't call for help," he said.

"What are you talking about?"

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Cable cried. "We have to!"

Drake felt very tired. "Look, if we send out a distress call, somebody's going to come sailing right in — but they won't be prepared for this kind of trouble. The Quedak will take them over and then use them against us."

"We can explain what the trouble is," Cable said.

"*Explain?* Explain *what?* That a bug is taking over the island? They'd think we were crazy with fever. They'd send in a doctor on the inter-island schooner."

"Dan's right," Sorensen said. "Nobody would believe this without seeing it for himself."

"And by then," Drake said, "it'd be too late. Eakins figured it out before the Quedak got him. That's why he told us not to send any messages."

Cable looked dubious. "But why did he want us to take the transmitter?"

"So that *he* couldn't send any messages after the bug got him," Drake said. "The more people trampling around, the easier it would be for the Quedak. If he had possession of the transmitter, he'd be calling for help right now."

"Yeah, I suppose so," Cable said unhappily. "But, damn it, we can't handle this *alone*."

"We have to. If the Quedak ever gets us and then gets off the island, that's it for Earth. Period. There won't be any big war, no hydrogen bombs or fallout, no heroic little resistance groups. Everybody will become part of the Quedak Co-operation."

"We ought to get help somehow," Cable said stubbornly. "We're alone, isolated. Suppose we ask for a ship to stand offshore—"

"It won't work," Drake said. "Besides, we couldn't ask for help even if we wanted to."

"Why not?"

"Because the transmitter's not working," Drake said. "You've been talking into a dead mike."

"It's receiving OK," Cable said.

DRAKE checked to see if all the switches were on. "Nothing wrong with the receiver. But we must have joggled something taking the transmitter out of the ship. It isn't working."

Cable tapped the dead microphone several times, then put it down. They stood around the receiver, listening to the chess game between the man in Rabaul and the man in Bougainville.

"Pawn to queen bishop four."

"Pawn to king three."

"Knight to Queen bishop three."

There was a sudden staccato burst of static. It faded, then came again in three distinct bursts.

"What do you suppose that is?" Sorensen asked.

Drake shrugged his shoulders. "Could be anything. Storm's shaping up and—"

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He stopped. He had been standing beside the door of the shed. As the static crackled, he saw the bird of paradise dive for a closer look. The static stopped when the bird returned to its slow-circling higher altitude.

"That's strange," Drake said. "Did you see that, Bill? The bird came down and the static went on at the same time."

"I saw it," Sorensen said. "Think it means anything?"

"I don't know. Let's see." Drake took out his field glasses. He turned up the volume of the receiver and stepped outside where he could observe the jungle. He waited, hearing the sounds of the chess game three or four hundred miles away.

"Come on now, move."

"Give me a minute."

"A minute? Listen, I can't stand in front of this bleeding set all night. Make your—"

Static crackled sharply. Drake saw four wild pigs come trotting out of the jungle, moving slowly, like a reconnaissance squad probing for weak spots in an enemy position. They stopped; the static stopped. Byrnes, standing guard with his rifle, took a snap shot at them. The pigs turned, and static crackled as they moved back into the jungle. There was more static as the bird of paradise swept down for a look, then climbed out of range. After that, the static stopped.

Drake put down his binoculars and went back inside the shed. "That must be it," he said. "The static is related to the Quedak. I think it comes when he's operating the animals."

"You mean he has come sort of radio control over them?" Sorensen asked.

"Seems like it," Drake said. "Either radio control or something propagated along a radio wavelength."

"If that's the case," Sorenson said, "he's like a little radio station, isn't he?"

"Sure he is. So what?"

"Then we should be able to locate him on a radio direction finder," Sorensen said.

Drake nodded emphatically. He snapped off the receiver, went to a corner of the shed and took out one of their portable direction finders. He set it to the frequency at which Cable had picked up the Rabaul - Bougainville broadcast. Then he turned it on and walked to the door.

THE men watched while Drake rotated the loop antenna. He located the maximum signal, then turned the loop slowly, read the bearing and converted it to a compass course. Then he sat down with a small-scale chart of the Southwest Pacific.

"Well," Sorensen asked, "is it the Quedak?"

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"It's got to be," said Drake. "I located a good null almost due south. That's straight ahead in the jungle."

"You're sure it isn't a reciprocal bearing?"

"I checked that out."

"Is there any chance the signal comes from some other station?"

"Nope. Due south, the next station is Sydney, and that's seventeen hundred miles away. Much too far for this RDF. It's the Quedak, all right."

"So we have a way of locating him," Sorensen said. "Two men with direction finders can go into the jungle—"

"—and get themselves killed," Drake said. "We can position the Quedak with RDFs, but his animals can locate us a lot faster. We wouldn't have a chance in the jungle."

Sorensen looked crestfallen. "Then we're no better off than before."

"We're a lot better off," Drake said. "We have a chance now."

"What makes you think so?"

"He controls the animals by radio," Drake said. "We know the frequency he operates on. We can broadcast on the same frequency. We can jam his signal."

"Are you sure about that?"

"Am I *sure?* Of course not. But I do know that two stations in the same area can't broadcast over the same frequency. If we tuned in to the frequency the Quedak uses, made enough noise to override his signal—"

"I see," Sorensen said. "Maybe it would work! If we could interfere with his signal, he wouldn't be able to control the animals. And then we could hunt him down with the RDFs."

"That's the idea," Drake said. "It has only one small flaw—our transmitter isn't working. With no transmitter, we can't do any broadcasting. No broadcasting, no jamming."

"Can you fix it?" Sorensen asked.

"I'll try," Drake said. "But we'd better not hope for too much. Eakins was the radio man on this expedition."

"We've got all the spare parts," Sorensen said. "Tubes, manual, everything."

"I know. Give me enough time and I'll figure out what's wrong. The question is, how much time is the Quedak going to give us?"

The bright copper disk of the sun was half submerged in the sea. Sunset colors touched the massing thunderheads and faded into the brief tropical twilight. The men began to barricade the copra shed for the night.

VI

DRAKE removed the back from the transmitter and scowled at the compact mass of tubes and

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wiring. Those metal boxlike things were probably condensers, and the waxy cylindrical gadgets might or might not be resistors. It all looked hopelessly complicated, ridiculously dense and delicate. Where should he begin?

He turned on the set and waited a few minutes. All the tubes appeared to go on, some dim, some bright. He couldn't detect any loose wires. The mike was still dead.

So much for visual inspection. Next question: was the set getting enough juice?

He turned it off and checked the battery cells with a voltmeter. The batteries were up to charge. He removed the leads, scraped them and put them back on, making sure they fit snugly. He checked all connections, murmured a propitiatory prayer, and turned the set on.

It still didn't work.

Cursing, he turned it off again. He decided to replace all the tubes, starting with the dim ones. If that didn't work, he could try replacing condensers and resistors. If that didn't work, he could always shoot himself. With this cheerful thought, he opened the parts kit and went to work.

The men were all inside the copra shed, finishing the job of barricading it for the night. The door was wedged shut and locked. The two windows had to be kept open for ventilation; otherwise everyone would suffocate in the heat. But a double layer of heavy mosquito netting was nailed over each window, and a guard was posted beside it.

Nothing could get through the flat galvanized-iron roof. The floor was of pounded earth, a possible danger point. All they could do was keep watch over it.

The treasure-hunters settled down for a long night. Drake, with a handkerchief tied around his forehead to keep the perspiration out of his eyes, continued working on the transmitter.

AN hour later, there was a buzz on the walkie-talkie. Sorensen picked it up and said, "What do you want?"

"I want you to end this senseless resistance," said the Quedak, speaking with Eakins' voice. "You've had enough time to think over the situation. I want you to join me. Surely you can see there's no other way."

"We don't want to join you," Sorensen said.

"You must," the Quedak told him.

"Are you going to make us?"

"That poses problems," the Quedak said. "My animal parts are not suitable for coercion. Eakins is an excellent mechanism, but there is only one of him. And I must not expose myself to unnecessary dan-

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ger. By doing so I would endanger the Quedak Mission."

"So it's a stalemate," Sorensen said.

"No. I am faced with difficulty only in taking you over. There is no problem in killing you."

The men shifted uneasily. Drake, working on the transmitter, didn't look up.

"I would rather *not* kill you," the Quedak said. "But the Quedak Mission is of primary importance. It would be endangered if you didn't join. It would be seriously compromised if you left the island. So you must either join or be killed."

"That's not the way I see it," Sorensen said. "If you killed us—assuming that you can — you'd never get off this island. Eakins can't handle that ketch."

"There would be no need to leave in the ketch," the Quedak said. "In six months, the inter-island schooner will return. Eakins and I will leave then. The rest of you will have died."

"You're bluffing," Sorensen said. "What makes you think you could kill us? You didn't do so well today." He caught Drake's attention and gestured at the radio. Drake shrugged his shoulders and went back to work.

"I wasn't trying," the Quedak said. "The time for that was at night. *This* night, before you have a chance to work out a better system of defense. You must join me tonight or I will kill one of you."

"One of us?"

"Yes. One man an hour. In that way, perhaps the survivors will change their minds about joining. But if they don't, all of you will be dead by morning."

Drake leaned over and whispered to Sorensen, "Stall him. Give me another ten minutes. I think I've found the trouble."

Sorensen said into the walkie-talkie, "We'd like to know a little more about the Quedak Cooperation."

"You can find out best by joining."

"We'd rather have a little more information on it first."

"IT is an indescribable state," the Quedak said in an urgent, earnest, eager voice. "Can you imagine yourself as *yourself* and yet experiencing an entirely new series of sensory networks? You would, for example, experience the world through the perceptors of a dog as he goes through the forest following an odor which to him—and to you — is as clear and vivid as a painted line. A hermit crab senses things differently. From him you experience the slow interaction of life at the margin of sea and land. His time-sense is very slow, unlike that of a bird of paradise, whose viewpoint is spatial, rapid, cursory. And there are many oth-

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ers, above and below the earth and water, who furnish their own specialized viewpoints of reality. Their outlooks, I have found, are not essentially different from those of the animals that once inhabited Mars."

"What happened on Mars?" Sorensen asked.

"All life died," the Quedak mourned. "All except the Quedak. It happened a long time ago. For centuries there was peace and prosperity on the planet. Everything and everyone was part of the Quedak Cooperation. But the dominant race was basically weak. Their breeding rate went down; catastrophes happened. And finally there was no more life except the Quedak."

"Sounds great," Sorensen said ironically.

"It was the fault of the race," the Quedak protested. "With sturdier stock — such as you have on this

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planet—the will to live will remain intact. The peace and prosperity will continue indefinitely."

"I don't believe it. What happened on Mars will happen again on Earth if you take over. After a while, slaves just don't care very strongly about living."

"You wouldn't be slaves. You would be functional parts of the Quedak Cooperation."

"Which would be run by you," Sorensen said. "Any way you slice it, it's the same old pie."

"You don't know what you're talking about," the Quedak said. "We have talked long enough. I am prepared to kill one man in the next five minutes. Are you or are you not going to join me?" Sorensen looked at Drake. Drake turned on the transmitter.

Gusts of rain splattered on the roof while the transmitter warmed up. Drake lifted the microphone and tapped it, and was able to hear

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the sound in the speaker.

"It's working," he said.

AT that moment something flew against the netting-covered window. The netting sagged; a fruit bat was entangled in it, glaring at them with tiny red-rimmed eyes.

"Get some boards over that window!" Sorensen shouted.

As he spoke, a second bat hurtled into the netting, broke through it and tumbled to the floor. The men clubbed it to death, but four more bats flew in through the open window. Drake flailed at them, but he couldn't drive them away from the transmitter. They were diving at his eyes, and he was forced back. A wild blow caught one bat and knocked it to the floor with a broken wing. Then the others had reached the transmitter.

They pushed it off the table. Drake tried to catch the set, and failed. He heard the glass tubes shattering, but by then he was busy protecting his eyes.

In a few minutes they had killed two more bats, and the others had fled out the window. The men nailed boards over both windows, and Drake bent to examine the transmitter.

"Any chance of fixing it?" Sorensen asked.

"Not a hope," Drake said. "They ripped out the wiring while they were at it."

"What do we do now?"

"I don't know."

Then the Quedak spoke to them over the walkie-talkie. "I must have your answer right now."

Nobody said a word.

"In that case," the Quedak said, "I'm deeply sorry that one of you must die now."

VII

RAIN pelted the iron roof and the gusts of wind increased in intensity. There were rumbles of distant thunder. But within the copra shed, the air was hot and still. The gasoline lantern hanging from the center beam threw a harsh yellow light that illuminated the center of the room but left the corners in deep shadow. The treasure-hunters had moved away from the walls. They were all in the center of the room facing outward, and they made Drake think of a herd of buffalo drawn up against a wolf they could smell but could not see.

Cable said, "Listen, maybe we should try this Quedak Cooperation. Maybe it isn't so bad as—"

"Shut up," Drake said.

"Be reasonable," Cable argued. "It's better than dying, isn't it?"

"No one's dying yet," Drake said. "Just shut up and keep your eyes open."

"I think I'm going to be sick," Cable said. "Dan, let me out."

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"Be sick where you are," Drake said. "Just keep your eyes open."

"You can't give me orders," Cable said. He started toward the door. Then he jumped back.

A yellowish scorpion had crept under the inch of clearance between the door and the floor. Recetich stamped on it, smashing it to pulp under his heavy boots. Then he whirled, swinging at three hornets which had come at him through the boarded windows.

"Forget the hornets!" Drake shouted. "Keep watching the ground!"

There was movement on the floor. Several hairy spiders crawled out of the shadows. Drake and Recetich beat at them with rifle butts. Byrnes saw something crawling under the door. It looked like some kind of huge flat centipede. He stamped at it, missed, and the centipede was on his boot, past it, on the flesh of his leg. He screamed; it felt like a ribbon of molten metal. He was able to smash it flat before he passed out.

Drake checked the wound and decided it was not fatal. He stamped on another spider, then felt Sorensen's hand clutching his shoulder. He looked toward the corner Sorensen was pointing at.

Sliding toward them were two large, dark-coated snakes. Drake recognized them as black adders. These normally shy creatures were coming forward like tigers.

THE men panicked, trying to get away from the snakes. Drake pulled out his revolver and dropped to one knee, ignoring the hornets that buzzed around him, trying to draw a bead on the slender serpentine targets in the swaying yellow light.

Thunder roared directly overhead. A long flash of lightning suddenly flooded the room, spoiling his aim. Drake fired and missed, and waited for the snakes to strike.

They didn't strike. They were moving away from him, retreating to the rat hole from which they had emerged. One of the adders slid quickly through. The other began to follow, then stopped, half in the hole.

Sorensen took careful aim with a rifle. Drake pushed the muzzle aside. "Wait just a moment."

The adder hesitated. It came out of the hole and began to move toward them again...

And there was another crash of thunder and a vivid splash of lightning. The snake turned away and squirmed through the hole.

"What's going on?" Sorensen asked. "Is the thunder frightening them?"

"No, it's the lightning!" Drake said. "That's why the Quedak was in such a rush. He saw that a storm was coming, and he hadn't consolidated his position yet."

"What are you talking about?"

"The lightning," Drake said.

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"The electrical storm! It's jamming that radio control of his! And when he's jammed, the beasts revert to normal behavior. It takes him time to re-establish control."

"The storm won't last forever," Cable said.

"But maybe it'll last long enough," Drake said. He picked up the direction finders and handed one to Sorensen. "Come on, Bill. We'll hunt out that bug right now."

"Hey," Recetich said, "isn't there something I can do?"

"You can start swimming if we don't come back in an hour," Drake said.

IN slanting lines the rain drove down, pushed by the wild southwest wind. Thunder rolled continually and each flash of lightning seemed aimed at them. Drake and Sorensen reached the edge of the jungle and stopped.

"We'll separate here," Drake said. "Gives us a better chance of converging on him."

"Right," Sorensen said. "Take care of yourself, Dan."

Sorensen plunged into the jungle. Drake trotted fifty yards down the fringe and then entered the bush.

He pushed forward, the revolver in his belt, the radio direction finder in one hand, a flashlight in the other. The jungle seemed to be animated by a vicious life of its own, almost as if the Quedak controlled it. Vines curled cunningly around his ankles and the bushes reached out thorny hands toward him. Every branch took a special delight in slapping his face.

Each time the lightning flashed, Drake's direction finder tried to home on it. He was having a difficult time staying on course. But, he reminded himself, the Quedak was undoubtedly having an even more difficult time. Between flashes, he was able to set a course. The further he penetrated into the jungle, the stronger the signal became.

After a while he noticed that the flashes of lightning were spaced more widely apart. The storm was moving on toward the north, leaving the island behind. How much longer would he have the protection of the lightning? Another ten or fifteen minutes?

He heard something whimper. He swung his flashlight around and saw his dog, Oro, coming toward him.

His dog — or the Quedak's dog?

"Hey there, boy," Drake said. He wondered if he should drop the direction finder and get the revolver out of his belt. He wondered if the revolver would still work after such a thorough soaking.

Oro came up and licked his hand. He was Drake's dog, at least for the duration of the storm.

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They moved on together, and the thunder rumbled distantly in the north. The signal on his RDF was very strong now. Somewhere around here...

He saw light from another flashlight. Sorensen, badly out of breath, had joined him. The jungle had ripped and clawed at him, but he still had his rifle, flashlight and direction finder.

Oro was scratching furiously at a bush. There was a long flash of lightning, and in it they saw the Quedak.

DRAKE realized, in those final moments, that the rain had stopped. The lightning had stopped, too. He dropped the direction finder. With the flashlight in one hand and his revolver in the other, he tried to take aim at the Quedak, who was moving, who had jumped—

To Sorensen's neck, just above the right collarbone.

Sorensen raised his hands, then lowered them again. He turned toward Drake, raising his rifle. His face was perfectly calm. He looked as though his only purpose in life was to kill Drake.

Drake fired from less than two feet away. Sorensen spun with the impact, dropped his rifle and fell.

Drake bent over him, his revolver ready. He saw that he had fired accurately. The bullet had gone in just above the right collarbone. It was a bad wound. But it had been much worse for the Quedak, who had been in the direct path of the bullet. All that was left of the Quedak was a splatter of black across Sorensen's chest.

Drake applied hasty first aid and hoisted Sorensen to his shoulders. He wondered what he would have done if the Quedak had been standing above Sorensen's heart, or on his throat, or on his head.

He decided it was better not to think about that.

He started back to camp, with his dog trotting along beside him.

— ROBERT SHECKLEY

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The Nuse Man

If you ever dig Ur and find one man buried seven times — here is the nastily simple explanation.

BY MARGARET ST. CLAIR

Illustrated by WOOD

I DON'T know why, really, the nuse man comes to call on me. He must realize by now I'll never order a nuse installation or an ipsissifex from him; I consider them as dangerous as anything our own lethal age has produced. Nuse, which is a power source that the nuse man describes as originating on the far side of 3000 A.D., is the worse of the two, but the ipsissifex, a matter duplicator, is bad enough. And though I listen to the nuse man's stories, I can hardly be considered a sympathetic audience. I suppose he drops in because I can always be depended on for a cup of tea and some toast and marmalade.

"Hello," he said as I answered the bell. "You've aged in the last six months."

Before I could wrap my tongue around the obvious *et tu* (he was

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looking terrible—his clothes looked as if they had been slept in by machinery, and there were bruises and cuts and lumps all over his face) he had pushed past me into the living room and was sitting down in my husband's easy chair. The dachshunds, who have never liked the nuse man, were growling at him earnestly. He put his feet up on the fireplace and lay back in the chair on his spine.

"Ahhhhhh!" he sighed, and then, to me, "Put more butter on the toast than you did last time."

When I came back with the tea, he was standing by one of the bookcases looking at Woolley's little book, *Ur: The First Phases.*

"Silly book," he grumbled. "That stuff about the plano-convex bricks is all wrong."

"What do you know about it?" I asked him.

"I sold a nuse installation to King Nebu-kalam-dug of Ur of the Chaldees on this last trip."

"Oh, yes? Well, the home office ought to be pleased with you. Perhaps they'll give you a vacation back in your own time."

The nuse man made no direct answer, but his battered, lumpy face grew dark. He bit into a slice of toast so savagely that I feared for his iridium alloy teeth.

"Don't tell me that something went wrong with the nuse *again!*" I cried.

This time he couldn't have answered if he had wanted to. He had choked over some toast crumbs, and I had to beat him on the back and pour tea down him before he could speak.

"Why are you so prejudiced against nuse?" he demanded at last. "The nuse had nothing to do with it. It was the king and the priests that birded it up."

"I'll bet."

THE nuse man's face turned even redder. It was a shade or two darker than the lapels around the waist of his trousers. "I'll tell you all about it!" he said passionately. "You be the judge!"

"Oh, Lord." There was no polite way of getting out of it. "All right," I said.

"Everything was going fine," the nuse man began, "until the old King, Nebu-kalam-dug, died. I'd sold him a nuse installation—"

"General or special?"

"Special, of course. Do I look like fool enough to put a general nuse installation into the hands of a lot of 3000 B.C. yaps? I sold him a special nuse installation in exchange for a stated number of Sumerian gold artifacts, so many on installation and so many each lunar month until the price was paid."

"What were the artifacts?"

"Gold wreaths and necklaces and jewelry. Of course, gold's nothing. Only good for lavatory daïses. But the workmanship was interesting

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and valuable. I knew the home office would be pleased. Then the old yoop died."

"What killed him?"

"His son, Nebu-al-karsig, poisoned him."

"Oh."

"Everybody in the court knew it, but of course nobody would talk about it. I was sorry the old king died, but I wasn't worried, because I thought I could work out the same sort of deal with the new king. Even when I saw how scared the court ladies looked when they were getting ready for the funeral, I didn't apperceive. And then the soldiers came and arrested me!"

"What had you done?" I asked suspiciously.

"Nothing. They were short little tzintes with big muscles, and they wore sort of skirts out of sheepskin with the wool twisted into bunches to look elegant. They wouldn't say a word while they were arresting me. Then I found out I was supposed to be strangled and put in the royal tomb with the dead king."

"Why?"

"Because I'd been one of the old man's special friends. At least, that was what young Nebu-al-karsig said. The prime minister and two or three of the councilors were being strangled along with me."

"Gosh."

"I argued and argued, and talked and talked. I told the young king we hadn't been such good friends as all *that*. And finally he said, very well, I could go with the court ladies in the death pit."

"Were you scared?"

"Of course I was scared," the nuse man said irritably. "I didn't have my chronnox—they'd arrested me in too much of a hurry for that—so I couldn't get into another time. And I had no way of getting in touch with the home office. Certainly I was scared. And then there was the indignity — somebody from when I come from, to be killed by a lot of primitive button heads. It made me sore."

HE slurped at his tea. "When we got to the pit," he continued, "they were just closing the old king's tomb up. You understand, the tomb was at the bottom of the pit, and there was a ramp leading down into it. They hung matting over the sides of the pit, to cover the earth, and then they backed old Nebu-kalam-dug's war chariot down the ramp; he'd want his chariot in the next world. Then the rest of us went down the ramp into the pit."

"Who was 'us'?" I asked curiously.

"Oh, harpists and singers and court ladies and slaves and soldiers and attendants. If anybody didn't want to go, the soldiers had spears they used for prodding. I counted, and there were fifty-eight of us."

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"Pretty barbarous," I said sympathetically.

"Nobody from your period has any right to call *anything* barbarous," the nuse man said severely. "I've seen some bad ages, but yours — ! Anyway, there we were.

"The funeral services began. The harpists twanged on their harps and the singers sang in high falsetto voices. It sounded awful. The priests chanted prayers from the edge of the pit above. The soldiers passed around an opiate in little bronze cups for us to drink. The priests prayed some more. It was beginning to get dark. Then they started shoveling earth in on us."

"Were you sorry for the others?" I asked.

"I was more sorry for myself. It was their era, and if they wanted to die in it, that was their business. After all, they thought that when they woke up they'd go on serving old Nebu-kalam-dug in the next world. *I* didn't — and even if I had, he was nobody I'd want to serve."

"How did you get out?" I asked quickly. I did not like the thought of the scene in the death pit, even if it had taken place so many thousands of years ago.

"I got under the car of the chariot to shelter myself from being crushed. After a long while, the earth stopped coming in and I decided the mourners had gone away. I didn't have my chronnox, and, as I told you, I couldn't get in touch with the home office. But I was wearing an ipsissifex. I started materializing myself up through the earth of the pit."

"You *didn't!*" I said incredulously.

"I did, though. Each 'me' was a little farther up through the earth layer of the pit."

"You mean there are five or six 'you's buried back there in Ur of the Chaldees?"

"Seven. Of course they weren't *really* alive — you know how an ipsissifex is."

IT was the first time I had ever heard the nuse man admit that one of the devices he was peddling might have a flaw.

"I clawed my way up through the last few inches of dirt without any more materializations," he said, "and started walking up the ramp. There was a soldier on guard at the top. When he saw me, his spear began to shake. It shook so much he could hardly hold it. The moon was coming up, and my shadow fell in front of me on the ramp.

"He licked his lips and swallowed before he could say anything. 'Get back in the pit and die,' he said finally. 'What are you doing out here? You're supposed to serve our lord Nebu-kalam-dug in the other world. Go on back and be dead.'

"I didn't say anything. I just

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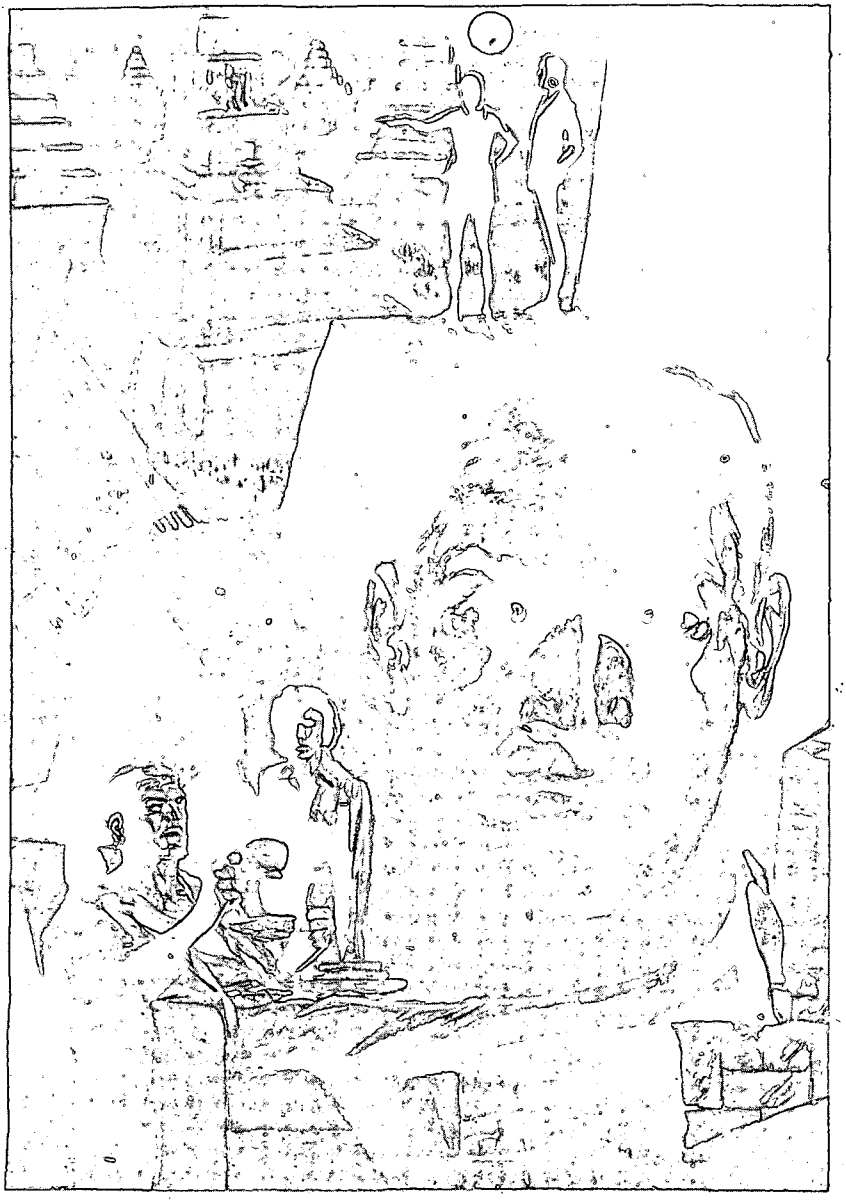

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kept walking closer to him. When I was about two feet away, he dropped his spear and ran.

"I didn't have any trouble getting in at the palace, either. Young Nebu-al-karsig was playing checkers on a fiddle-shaped board with one of his girls when I walked into the great hall. When he saw me, he jumped up and the board fell to one side and the pieces rolled over the floor. I said, 'My lord Nebu-al-karsig, I am harder to kill than your noble father was.'

"He had turned a dirty greenish tan. He said, 'I saw — I saw —'

"I sat down on the floor in front of him and bumped my head on it a couple of times to show I was going to be polite. Then I said, in a deep, serious voice, 'A magician cannot die until his time has come, my lord. Shall we discuss extending the nuse installation I made for your respected sire?' And he said, 'Yes, let's.' "

"It's a wonder he didn't try to poison you," I commented.

"Scared to," the nuse man said briefly. "Anyhow, we agreed I was to increase the nuse installation by one third, and in return Nebu-al-karsig was to pay me twice as many gold artifacts each lunar month as his father had, and for half again as long. It took a lot of figuring and explaining by the royal scribes before the king could understand the terms of the agreement, but he finally was satisfied with the arithmetic. Oh, and I got my old rooms in the palace back."

"What did the special installation do?" I poured the last of the tea into the nuse man's cup and went out to the kitchen to put water on to heat for more.

"It made bricks," he said when I came back. "Beautiful, even, true, symmetrical mud bricks. Nebu-kalam-dug had been crazy about those bricks, and even Nebu-al-karsig thought they were pretty neat. You should have seen the adobe junk the brickmakers had been turning out by hand — sloppy, roundish affairs, all different sizes, with straw sticking out of them. Yes, my installation made bricks."

"What did they use the bricks for?" I asked.

"For ziggurats — stepped temple pyramids. They made the first story black, the second white, the third red, and the last blue. Sometimes, just for a change, they'd do an all-blue or an all-red pyramid.

"For a while, everything was fine. Ziggurats were going up all over the place, and the skyline of Ur altered rapidly. The priests were pleased because all those ziggurats meant more priests were needed. Nebu-al-karsig was pleased because he was going down in history as the greatest ziggurat builder of his dynasty. And I was pleased because I was getting a lot of elegant artifacts. Then things started to go sour."

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"The nuse," I murmured. "I knew it."

THE nuse man glared at me. "It . . . was . . . not . . . the . . . nuse!" he said, biting off the words. "What happened was the brickmakers started to get sore. They were out of jobs, you see, because of the nuse. And the bricklayers were almost as badly off. They were working twelve hours a day, seven days a week, without any overtime, trying to use up all the bricks. Pretty soon there would be riots in the streets.

"Nebu-al-karsig asked me what I thought he ought to do. I told him, let the brickmakers into the bricklayers' guild. That way he'd have twice as many men to build ziggurats. So he issued a decree. And then there *were* riots in the streets.

" 'What,' said the bricklayers, 'let those dirty sheep's livers into our union? When they haven't served a seven years' apprenticeship?' 'What,' said the brickmakers, 'be forced to give up our noble art, sacred to Nintud since time immemorial, in exchange for slicking mud paste over heartless mechanical bricks?' Then both sides shrieked 'Never!' and barricades, made out of brick baskets and cobblestones, began to go up everywhere.

"I suppose the fuss would have died down in time. People—as your age has learned — can get used to anything. But Nebu-al-karsig was sleeping badly. Palace gossip had it that he'd wake up screaming from dreams about his father. He asked the priests what the cause of the trouble was, and they told him that some of the minor gods, those who hadn't got ziggurats yet, were mad at him. The people in Ur had about four thousand gods. So he decided to have the nuse installation turn out more bricks.

"Every morning, as soon as it was daylight, a bunch of shaveheaded priests would file into the nuse factory. They'd stand in front of the installation, concentrating, for an hour, and then a new batch of priests would come. They kept that up all day. Nuse, of course, is basically a neural force. By the end of the day, bricks would be simply pouring out of the brick hoppers. Even to me, who had nothing to do with laying them, seeing all those mountains and mountains of bricks was very discouraging.

"I tried to argue with Nebu-al-karsig about it. I told him as politely as I could that he was endangering his throne. But he'd never liked me, and after the episode of the brickmakers' guild, he hadn't trusted me. He wouldn't listen. I decided it was time I got out of Ur.

"I had one more installment of artifacts due me. I would collect that and then leave. By now the chest of artifacts in my bedroom was almost full.

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"The day of the installment came and went, and no artifacts. I mentioned it to Nebu-al-karsig and he showed his teeth at me. But on the next day, ten or twelve priests came to my rooms with a little box. The head priest opened it and gave it to me. In it were the missing artifacts.

"They weren't quite what my contract called for, but I was glad to get them. I thanked the head priest for them as nicely as I knew how, and he smiled and suggested that we have a drink. I said fine, and he poured it out. One of the minor priests was carrying goblets and the wineskin. I put out my hand for the cup and the head priest — did I tell you I'd put a small general nuse installation in my rooms?"

I THOUGHT back. "No, you didn't."

"Well, I had," said the nuse man. "I wasn't going to be bothered with slow, stupid slaves waiting on me. I put out my hand for the cup and the priest went sailing up in the air. He hit on the ceiling with a considerable thump. Then he went around the room, floating just at eye-level, and whacked solidly against each of the four corners. He hit the fourth corner harder and faster than he had the first. I could see that his mouth was open and he looked scared.

"There was a kind of pause while he hovered in the air. Then he went up and hit the ceiling, came down toward the floor, up to the ceiling, down again, up, hovered, and then came down on the floor for the last time with a great crashing *whump!* He landed so hard I thought I felt the floor shake. I knew he must be hurt.

"I stood there frozen for a moment. I couldn't imagine what had happened. Then it came to me. The drink in my cup had been poisoned. I suppose Nebu-al-karsig hadn't had nerve enough to do it himself. And the nuse installation in my room hadn't let the head priest get away with it.

"A nuse never makes a mistake. 'The airy servitor. Don't think, use nuse.' The more I sell it, the more I'm convinced that it's wonderful stuff. This time it had saved my life. I couldn't help wishing for a minute, though, that it had just tipped over the poisoned cup quietly, because banging a priest around like that was sure to be sacrilege.

"The other priests had been as surprised as I was. Now they began to mutter and heft the clubs they were carrying. The nuse might be able to handle all of them at once, but I didn't wait to find out. I made a dash into the next room and bolted the door.

"I was wearing my chronnox. All I had to do was grab my chest of artifacts and go to some other time. I made a dive under the bed for

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the chest. And it wasn't there."

"Stolen?" I asked helpfully.

The nuse man shook his head. "No, I don't think so. Not with a nuse installation on guard. I think the nuse had levitated the chest to some safe place for extra security. I concentrated on getting the nuse to bring the chest back, and I did hear noises, levitation noises, as though it were trying to obey me. But it had all it could do to handle the priests in the next room.

"By now there was a considerable commotion in the palace. Doors were opening, people were shouting, I heard soldiers outside in the hall. Thumps and bumps from my sitting room showed that the nuse was still doing what it could with the priests, but several people were throwing themselves as hard as they could against the connecting door. I didn't know how much longer the bolts would hold.

"I tried concentrating on getting the nuse to abandon the priests and bring me my chest. I'm sure it would have worked in another minute. But then there was a lot of yelling and they began using a ram on the door. One of the panels busted. The hinges were sagging. I had to go."

THE nuse man looked so depressed that I poured him out more tea. Just as I had suspected in the beginning, the nuse — always incalculable, always tricky, the essence of unreliability — the nuse had been at the bottom of his troubles. It always was. I had too much sense to say so, though.

"What was the point you were making about the plano-convex bricks?" I finally asked.

The nuse man looked even more gloomy. I wished I hadn't mentioned it. He picked a leaf out of his tea with his spoon and frowned savagely at it.

"I went back to Ur," he said finally. "I wanted to see what had happened about the bricks, and of course I wanted my chest. I picked a time about ten years later."

"Well?"

"The first thing I noticed was the skyline. Every one of the ziggurats Nebu-al-karsig had put up was gone. I walked up to where one of them had been, and there was nothing but a heap of bricks, and the bricks looked as if people had pounded them with hammers.

"I walked on to the center of town where the royal palace had been. It was gone, too, and what looked like a new royal palace was going up to the north of it. It was plain what had happened. There had been a revolution, Nebu-al-karsig had been overthrown, Ur had a new king. I ought to have gone then. But I was still curious about my chest.

"The nuse factory had been just outside the palace walls. It had been razed too — my beautiful in-

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stallation! — but I could see people working around where it had been. I went over to talk to them.

"When I got up to them, I saw they were making bricks. Making them by hand, in the dumb, inefficient, old-fashioned way. But these weren't rectangular bricks, the way the ones before my nuse bricks had been. These were rectangular on the sides and bottom, but they had round tops, like loaves of bread."

"In other words," I said, "plano-convex bricks."

"Yes. It was the most impractical idea in the world. Their changing to such a silly shape made me realize how much the brickmakers had hated the nuse bricks. By the way — I know how curious you are — you'll be interested to learn that walls made with bricks of that kind don't look especially different from ordinary walls."

"OH," I said. "I'd been wondering about that."

"I thought you'd be glad to know," said the nuse man. "Well, I went up close to one of the brickmakers and watched him working. The pace he was going, he'd be lucky if he got ten bricks done in a day. He smoothed his brick and rounded it and patted it. He put more mud on it and stood back to watch the effect. He pushed a wisp of straw into the surface with the air of an artist applying a spot of paint. He just loved that brick.

"I cleared my throat, but he didn't seem to hear me. I said, 'Say, I heard where they found a chest with gold and jewels in the ruins of the old palace yesterday.'

"'Another one?' he answered, without looking up. 'You know, they found one on the south side of the palace about five years ago. Full of treasure. Some people have all the luck. Me, I never find anything.'

"The south side of the palace was where my rooms had been. I made a sort of noise.

"Up to then the worker had been too busy patting his round-topped brick to pay any attention to me. Now he looked up. His eyes got wide. His jaw dropped. He stared at me. 'Aren't you — are you —' he said doubtfully.

"Then he made up his mind. 'Brothers! Brothers!' he shouted. 'It's the foreign magician, come back to curse us again! Hurry! Kill him! Kill him! Kill the stinking sheep liver! Quick!'

"You wouldn't have thought that people who were working as slowly as they were could move so quick. As soon as they heard the words 'foreign magician,' they went into action, and before he got to the second 'Kill him!' the air was black with flying bricks."

"So that's how your face—"

"Yes. Of course, not all the bricks were dry. If they had been — but

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even a wet brick can be painful."

"And you never got your chest back."

"No. All I got was the artifacts the priest brought me just before the nuse levitated him. Would you like to see them?"

He sounded as if he wanted to show them to me. I said, "Yes, I'd like to."

He got out a little box and opened it. Inside was a piece of lapis lazuli that he said was a whetstone, two crude gold rings with roughly cabochon cut blackish stones, and a handsome gold necklace with lapis lazuli beads and gold pendants shaped like some sort of leaf.

"Very pretty," I said, examining them.

"You should have seen the stuff I had! But this is better than nothing. The home office will be glad to see it. I don't usually get even this much."

THIS was true, and he looked so depressed when he said it that I felt a burst of sympathy for him. I didn't know what to say.

He picked up the last piece of toast on the plate and looked at it.

"Burned," he said sourly, "and one of the other slices was, too. Listen, why don't you let me put in a nuse installation for you? Then your toast would never be burned. It's this housework that's getting you down. You might get so you didn't look any older than your real age if you used nuse."

"You should live so long," I said.

— MARGARET ST. CLAIR

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

FORECAST

The curtain-raiser for the April Galaxy is a joyous interstellar frolic by that young-hearted oldtimer, George O. Smith. Smith has set himself (and his bewitched and bewitching characters) a whole constellation of light-minded but absolutely urgent problems: the job is the colonization of the Universe, and the tactics are . . . well, the tactics are what you will learn when you read THE TROUBLEMAKERS. This one is full novella length and a joy from beginning to end.

The second position in this all-star lineup is a stirring and sharply drawn voyage through strangeness by no less brilliant a tale-spinner that Cordwainer Smith. (No relation to George). At novelet length, it packs in more solid emotion and dynamic drive than many a full-length book — but then that's only to be expected from both the Smiths in the first place, isn't it? The title is THE LADY WHO SAILED THE SOUL. You won't forget her!

Naturally there will be shorts, but how many and by whom is anybody's guess as of this moment. The safe is full of first-rate examples, with the finest bylines in science fiction. And Willy Ley, of course.

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Antimony IX divers can't be seen, of course . . . but don't have anything in mind when one of them is around you!

By JAMES STAMERS

dumbwaiter

Illustrated by DILLON

THE man ahead of me had a dragon in his baggage. So the Lamavic boys confiscated it. Lamavic — Livestock, Animal, Mineral and Vegetable, International Customs — does not like to find dragons curled up in a thermos. And since this antipathy was a two-way exchange, the Lamavic inspectors at Philadelphia International were singed and heated all ways by the time they got to me. I knew them well.

"Mr. Sol Jones?"

"That's right," I said, watching the would-be dragon smuggler being marched away. A very amateur job. I could have told him. There are only two ways to smuggle a dragon nowadays.

"Any livestock to declare, Mr. Jones?"

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"I have no livestock on my person or in my baggage, nor am I accompanied by any material prohibited article," I said carefully, for I saw they were recording.

The little pink, bald inspector with a charred collar looked at his colleague.

"Anything known?"

His colleague looked down at me from six feet of splendid physique, smiled unpleasantly, and flipped the big black record book.

"'Sol Jones,'" he read. "'Lamavic four-star offender. Galactic registration: six to tenth power: 763918. Five foot ten inches, Earth scale. Blue eyes, hair variable and usually nondescript brown, ear lobes and cranial . . .' You're not disputing identity, Mr. Jones?"

"Oh, no. That's me."

"I see. 'Irrevocable Galactic citizenship for services to family of Supreme President Xgol in matter of asteroid fungus, subsequent Senatorial amnesty confirmed, previous sentences therefore omitted. Lamavic offenses thereafter include no indictable evidence but total twenty-four minor fines for introducing prohibited livestock onto various planets. Suspected complicity in Lamavic cases One through Seventy-six as follows: mobile sands, crystal thinkers, recording turtle, operatic fish, giant mastodon.' Mr. Jones, you seem to have given us trouble before."

"Before what?"

"Before this — er—"

"That," I said, "is an Unconstitutional remark. I am giving no trouble. I have made a full declaration. I demand the rights of a Galactic citizen."

He apologized, as he had to. This merely made both inspectors angry, but they were going to search me anyway. I knew that. Certainly I am a smuggler, and I had in fact a little present for my girl Florence — a wedding present, I hoped — but they would never find it. This time I really had them fooled, and I intended to extract maximum pleasure from watching their labors.

I SAW the Lamavic records once. The next leading offender has only two stars and he's out on Ceres in the penal colony. My four stars denote that I disapprove of all these rules prohibiting the carrying of livestock from one planet to another. Other people extend the Galactic Empire; I extend my Galactic credit. You want an amusing extraterrestrial pet to while away the two-hour work week, I can provide one. Of course, this pet business was overdone in the early days when any space-hopper could bring little foreign monsters back to the wife and kiddies. Any weird thing could come in and did.

"You are aware, Mr. Jones, that you have declared that you are not trying to bring in any prohibited

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life-form, whether animal, mineral, vegetable, or any or all of these?"

"I am," I said.

"You are further aware of the penalties for a false declaration?"

"In my case, I believe I could count on thirty years' invigorating work on a penal planet."

"You could, Mr. Jones. You certainly could."

"Well, I've made my declaration."

"Will you step this way?"

Very polite in Philadelphia Spaceport. I followed the inspectors into the screening cubicles. There was a nasty looking device in the corner.

"I thought those things were illegal," I said.

"Unfortunately, Mr. Jones, you are, as you know, quite right. We may not employ a telepath instrument on any unconvicted person."

They looked sorry, but I wasn't. A telepath would have told them immediately where I had Florence's pet, and all about it. I smiled at them. They paid no attention, took my passport and began turning up the Lamavic manual on Antimony IX, Livestock of, Prohibited Forms. I had just come from there and so had Florence's little diver, which I had brought as a happy surprise. I sat down. The two inspectors looked as if they were going to say something, then continued flipping pages of their manual.

"Here it is — Antimony IX"

One of them read out the prohibitions and the other tried to watch me and the reflex counter behind me at the same time — a crude instrument which should be used, in my professional view, only to determine a person's capacities for playing poker with success.

"Ants-water, babblers, bunces, candelabra plants, catchem-fellers, Cythia Majoris, divers, dunces, dimple-images, drakes, dunking dogs, dogs-savage, dogs-water, dogs-not-otherwise-provided-for, unspec., elephants-miniature, fish-any . . ."

They went on. Antimony IX is teeming with life and almost every specimen is prohibited on other planets. We had passed the divers, anyway. I smiled and gave the reflex counter a strong jerk just as the smaller inspector was saying "Mammoths." They looked at me in silence.

"Funny man," one said, and they went on reading.

"Okay," the large inspector said at last. "We'll examine him for everything."

FOR the next three hours, they took blood specimens to see if I had microscopic livestock hidden there, they X-rayed me and my baggage, fluoroscoped everything again, put the baggage through an irritator life-indexer, investigated my orifices in detail with a variety

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of instruments, took skin scrapings in case I was wearing a false layer, and the only thing they found was my dark glasses.

"Why don't you wear modern contact lenses?"

"It's none of your business," I said, "but these old-style spectacles have liquid lenses."

There was a flurry and they sent away for analysis a small drop from one of the lenses. There were no signs of prohibited life in the liquid.

"I could have told you that," I said. "It's dicyanin, a vegetable extract. Diminishes the glare."

I put the glasses on my nose and hooked on the earpieces. The effect was medieval, but I could see the little diver now. I could also see disturbing evidence of the inspectors' mental condition. A useful little device invented by Dr. W. J. Kilner (1847-1920) for the study of the human aura in sickness and health. After a little practice, which I was not going to allow the Lamavic inspectors, the retina became sufficiently sensitive to see the micro-wave aura when you looked through the dicyanin screen. As was true of most of these psi pioneers at that time, nothing was done to further Kilner's work when he died. I noticed, without surprise, that the inspectors had a mental field of very limited extent and that the little diver had survived the journey nicely.

"Can I go now?" I asked.

"This time, Mr. Jones."

When I left, the repair staff was building a new inspection barrier to replace the parts the dragon had got. Such an amateur performance! Leave smuggling to professionals and we'd have Lamavic disbanded from boredom in ten years. I nearly slipped on the fine silica dioxide which had fused in the air when the dragon got annoyed. Nasty, dangerous pets.

The one for Florence was the only contraband I was carrying this trip, which was purely pleasure. She was waiting for me in her apartment, tall, golden, luscious, and all mine. She thought I was in import-export, which in a sense was true.

"I've missed you so much, Sol," she said, twining herself on me and the couch like a Venusian water-nymph. "Did you bring me a present?"

I lay back and let her kiss me.

"Of course I did. A small but very valuable present."

I let her kiss me again.

"Not — a Jupiter diamond, Sol?"

"Much rarer than that, and more useful."

"Oh. Useful."

"Something to help you in the house when we're married, honey. Now, don't pout so prettily, or I'll never get around to showing you."

My homecoming was not developing quite as I planned, but I put this down to womanly, if not exact-

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ly maidenly, quirks. When she found out what I had brought her, I was sure she would be all over me again. I put on my dark glasses so that I could see where the diver was.

"Would you like a drink, honey?" I asked.

"I don't mind," she said sulkily.

I LOOKED at the diver, concentrated hard on the thought of a bottle from the cabinet, two glasses and a pitcher of ice from the kitchen. He went revolving through the air obediently and the items came floating out neatly. Florence nearly shattered the windows with her screams.

"Now calm down, honey," I said, catching her. "Calm down. It's just a little present I brought you."

The bottle, glasses and pitcher dropped gently onto the table beside us.

"See?" I said. "Service at a thought. Remote control. The end of housework. Kiss me."

She didn't.

"You mean you did that, Sol?"

"Not me, exactly. I've brought you a little baby diver, honey, all the way from Antimony IX, just for you. There isn't another one on Earth. In fact, I doubt if there's another one outside Antimony IX. I had a lot of trouble securing this rare and valuable present for you."

"I don't like it. It gives me the creeps."

"Honey," I said carefully, "this is a little baby. It couldn't hurt a mouse. It's about six inches in diameter, and all it is doing is to teleport what you want it to teleport."

"Then why can't I see it?"

"If you could see it, I wouldn't have been allowed to bring it for you, honey, because a whole row of nasty-minded Solar Civil Servants would have seen it too, and they would have taken it from your own sweet Sol."

"They can have it."

"Honey, this is a *rare* and *valuable* pet! It will *do* things for you."

"So you think I need something done for me. Well! I'm glad you came right out and said this before we were married!"

The following series of "but — but—" from me and irrelevance from Florence occupied an hour, but hardly mentioned the diver. Eventually I got her back into my arms.

My urges for Florence were strictly biological, though intense. There were little chances for intellectual exchanges between us, but I was more interested in the broad probabilities of her as a woman. I could go commune with wild and exotic intelligences on foreign planets any time I had the fare. As a woman, Florence was what I wanted.

"Back on Antimony IX," I explained carefully, "life is fierce and rugged. So, to keep from being

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eaten, these little divers evolved themselves into little minds with no bodies at all, and they feed off solar radiation. Now, honey, minds are not made of the same stuff brains are made of, good solid tissue and gray matter and neural cortex—"

"Don't be dirty, Sol."

"There is nothing dirty about the body, honey. Minds are invisible but detectable in the micro-wavelengths on any sensitive counter, and look like little glass eggs when you can see them—as I can, by using these glasses. In fact, your diver is over by the window now. But, having evolved this far, they came across a little difficulty and couldn't evolve any further. So there they are, handy little minds for teleporting whatever you want moved, and reading other people's thoughts."

SHE gasped. "Did you say reading other people's thoughts?

"Certainly," I said. "As a matter of fact, that's what stopped the divers from evolving further. If they brush against any thinking creature, they pick up whatever thought is in the creature's conscious mind. But they also pick up the subliminal activity, if you follow me — and down at that level of a mind such as man's, his thoughts are not only the present unconscious thoughts but also a good slice of what is to him still the future. It's one of those space-time differences. The divers are not really on the same space-time reference as the physical world, but that makes them all the more useful, because our minds aren't either."

"Did you say reading other people's thoughts, like a telepath?" she persisted.

"Exactly like a telepath, or any other class of psi. We're really living on a much wider scale than we're conscious of, but our mind only tracks down one point in time-space in a straight line, which happens to fit our bodies. Our subliminal mind is way out in every direction, including time — and when you pick up fragments of this consciously, you're a psi, that's all. So the divers got thoroughly confused—that's what it amounts to—and never evolved any further. So you see, honey, it's all perfectly natural."

"I think you're just dirty."

"Eh?"

"Everyone *hates* telepaths. You know that."

"I don't."

"Oh, you go wandering all over the Galaxy — but my friends — what could I say to my friends if they learned I had something like a telepath in the apartment?"

"It's only a baby diver, I keep telling you, honey. And anyway, you'll be able to tell what they're really thinking about you."

Florence looked thoughtful.

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"And what they've been doing?"

"Sometimes they will do what they think they'll do. And sometimes they don't make it. But it's what their subliminal plans to have happen, yes."

She kissed me. "I think it's a lovely present, Sol."

She snuggled up to me and I concentrated on bringing the diver over to her. I thought I'd read her, just for a joke, and see what she had in mind. I took a close look.

"What's the matter, Sol?"

"Oh, honey! You beautiful creature!"

"This is nice — but what made you say that?"

"I just got the diver to show me your mind, and bits of the next two weeks you have in mind. It's going to be a lovely, lovely vacation."

She blushed very violently and got angry. "You had no right to look at what I was thinking, Sol!"

"It wasn't what you were thinking so much as what you will be thinking, honey. I figure in it quite well."

"I won't have it, Sol! Do you hear me? I think spying on people is detestable!"

"I thought you liked the idea of tagging your friends?"

"That's different. Either we go somewhere without that whatever-it-is, or you can marry someone else. I don't mind having it around after we're married, but not before, Sol. Do you understand?"

I was already reaching for the video yellow pages.

I TURNED on the television-wall in the apartment before we left and instructed the diver to stay around and watch it. They are very curious creatures, inquisitive, always chasing new ideas, and I thought that should hold the diver happily for several days. Meanwhile, I had booked adjoining rooms at the Asteroid-Central.

The Asteroid-Central advertised in the video yellow pages that it practiced the Most Rigid Discrimination—meaning no telepaths, clairvoyants, clairaudients or psychometrists. Life was hard on a psi outside Government circles. But life was much harder on the rest of the world seeking secluded privacy and discretion. The Asteroid-Central was so discreet, you could hardly see where you were going. Dim lights, elegant figures passing in the gloom, singing perfumes of the gentlest kind, and "Guaranteed Psi-Free" on every bedroom door.

I was humming idly in my room, with one eye on the communicating door through which, were she but true to her own mind, Florence would shortly come, and I turned on the television-wall only to see how less fortunate people were spending their leisure. An idle and most regrettable gesture.

There was a quiz-game on International Channel 462, dull and

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just finishing. All the contestants seemed to know all the answers. In fact, the man who won the trip around the Rings of Saturn, did so by answering the question before the Martian quiz-master had really finished reading it out. When the winner turned sharply on the other contestants and knocked them down, yelling, "So that's what you think of my mother, is it?" the wall was blacked out and we were taken straight to the Solar Party Convention.

The nominee this decade was human. He seemed to be speaking on his aims, his pure record and altruistic intentions. The stereo cameras looked over the heads of the delegates. Starting in the row by the main aisle, each delegate shot to his feet and started booing and jeering. It rippled down the rows like a falling pack of cards, each delegate in turn after the man in front of him, and each row picking up where the back of the previous row left off. It was as if someone were passing a galvanizing brush along the heads of the delegates, row by row.

Or as if a diver were refreshing the delegates with a clear picture of their nominee's mind.

I groaned and called Florence.

"Look," I said when she came. "That damned pet has followed the program back to the cameras from your apartment, and there he is lousing up the Convention."

"I vote Earth," she told me indifferently.

"That isn't the point, honey. I'll have to bring the diver here, and quickly."

"You do that, Sol. I'll be at home when you get rid of it."

By the time the diver picked up my thoughts and came flickering into the room through the walls, Florence had left.

I felt the diver off the back of my head, made my thoughts as kindly as possible, and went downstairs to the largest, longest bar.

THE evening passed profitably because I was invited to join a threesome of crooks at cards. With the aid of the little diver, I was able to shorten the odds to a pleasant margin in my favor. But this was doing nothing about Florence. A not altogether funny remark about teleporting the cards did, however, suggest the answer.

After the transaction was over, I sent the diver off to a friend on the faculty of Luke University, where they had a long history of psi investigation and where the diver could be guaranteed to be kept busy rolling dice and such. This was easy to fix by a video call. There had been times in the past when certain services to the Extra-terrestrial Zoology and Botanical Tanks had made me discreetly popular with the faculty, and anyway they thought I was doing them a

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favor. They promised to keep the little diver busy for an indefinite period.

I reported to Florence, and after a certain amount of feminine shall-I-shan't-I, she came back to the Asteroid-Central.

This time I did not turn on the television-wall. I lay still. I said nothing. I hardly thought at all. And after several years compressed themselves into every minute, my own true honey, Florence, slid open the communicating door and came into the room.

She walked shyly toward me, hiding modestly within a floating nightgown as opaque as a very clear soap bubble.

I stood up, held out my arms and she came toward me, smiling — and stopped to pick up something on the carpet.

"Ooo, Sol! Look! A Jupiter diamond!"

She held up the largest and most expensive diamond I have ever seen.

I was just going to claim credit for this little gift when another appeared, and another, and a long line marching over the carpet like an ant trail. They came floating in under the door.

Now love is for vacations, and between my own sweet Florence and a diamond mine there is no comparison. I put on my dicyanin glasses and saw the baby diver was back and at work teleporting. I said so, but this time there were no hysterics from Florence.

"I was just thinking of him," she said, "and wishing you had brought me a Jupiter diamond instead."

"Well, honey, it looks as if you've got both."

I watched her scrambling on the carpet, gathering handfuls of diamonds and not in the least interested in me.

On Antimony IX, the little divers switched from one space-time point to another simultaneously, and the baby diver had come back from the Solar Party Convention the same way. I thought of it and it came; Florence had just thought of it and here it was. But now it seemed to be flitting lightly from Earth to Jupiter and back with diamonds, so perhaps there was no interplanetary distance to a mind.

This had a future. I could see myself with a winter and a summer planet of my own, even happily paying Earth, Solar and Galactic taxes.

"Well, honey, don't you worry," I said. "You don't like divers, so I'll take it back and give you something else. Just leave it to Sol."

"Take your foot off that diamond, Sol Jones! You gave me this dear little diver and he's mine!"

SHE sat back on her heels and thought. The evidence of her thinking immediately came trick-

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ling through the door — Venusian opals set in a gold bracelet half a pound heavy, Martian sleeze furs, spider-web stockings, platinum belts. The room was beginning to look like a video fashion center, a Galactic merchandise mart. And after Florence put on a coat and opened the door, her ideas began to get bigger.

"This is fun!" she cried, teleporting like mad. "Why, I can have anything in the Galaxy just by thinking about it!"

"Now, honey, think of the benefits to humanity! This is too big to be used for personal gain. This should be dedicated—"

"This is dedicated to me, Sol Jones, so just you keep your fingers off it. Why, the cute little thing — look, he's been out to Saturn for me!"

I made a decision. Think wide and grand, Sol Jones, I said. Sacrifice yourself for the greater good.

"Florence, honey, you know I love you. Will you marry me?"

That stopped her. "You mean it, Sol?"

"Of course."

"It's not just because of this diver?"

"Why, honey, how could you think such a thing? If I'd never brought it in for you, I'd still want to marry you."

"You never said so before," she said. "But okay. If you do it now. Right now, Sol Jones."

So the merchandise stopped coming in while we plugged into the video and participated in a moving and legal ceremony. The marriage service was expensive, but after all we could teleport in a few thousand credit blanks from the Solar Treasury. Immediately after we had switched off, we did so.

"Are you sure you married me for myself, Sol?"

"I swear it, honey. No other thought entered my head. Just you."

I made a few notes while Florence planned the house we would have, furnished with rare materials from anywhere. I thought one of the medium asteroids would do for a base for Sol Jones Intragalactic Transport. I could see it all, vast warehouses and immediate delivery of anything from anywhere. I wondered if there was a limit to the diver's capacity, so Florence desired an encyclopedia and in it came, floating through the doorway.

"It says," she read, "not much is known about Antimony IX divers because none have ever been known to leave their planet."

"They probably need the stimulus of an educated mind," I said. "Anyway, this one can get diamonds from Jupiter and so on, and that's what matters."

I KISSED the wife of the President of Sol Jones Intragalactic and was interrupted by discreet

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tapping on the door. The manager of the Asteroid-Central beamed at us.

"Excuse," he said. "But we understand you have just been married, Mr. and Mrs. Jones."

"Irrevocably," I said.

"Felicitations. The Asteroid-Central will be sending up complimentary euphorics. There is just a small point, Mr. Jones. We notice you have a large selection of valuable gifts for the bride."

He looked round the room and smiled at the piles of stuff Florence had thought of.

"Of course," he went on, "we trust your stay will be pleasant and perhaps you will let us know if you will be wanting anything else."

"I expect we will, but we'll let you know," I said.

"Thank you, Mr. Jones. It is merely that we noticed you had emptied every showcase on the ground floor and, a few moments ago, teleported the credit contents of the bar up here. Not of importance, really; it is all charged on your bill."

"You saw it and didn't stop it?" I yelled.

"Oh, no, Mr. Jones. We always make an exception for Antimony IX divers. Limited creatures, really, but good for our business. We get about one a month — smuggled in, you know. But the upkeep proves too expensive. Some women do shop without more than a passing thought, don't they?"

I saw what he meant, but Mrs. Sol Jones took it very philosophically.

"Never mind, Sol — you have me."

"Or vice versa, honey," I said.

— JAMES STAMERS

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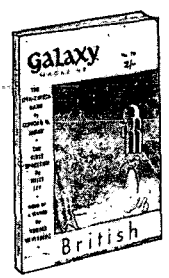

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The Day The Icicle Works Closed

That was a sad and frightening day for Altair Nine—

for on any world, when the forage grows thin,

predators grow fat!

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BY FREDERIK POHL

Illustrated by DILLON

I

THE wind was cold, pink snow was falling, and Milo Pulcher had holes in his shoes. He trudged through the pink-grey slush across the square from the courthouse to the jail.

The turnkey was drinking coffee out of a vinyl container. "Expecting you," he grunted. "Which one you want to see first?"

Pulcher sat down, grateful for the warmth. "It doesn't matter. Say, what kind of kids are they?"

The turnkey shrugged.

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"I mean, do they give you any trouble?"

"How could they give me trouble? If they don't clean their cells, they don't eat. What else they do makes no difference to me. Which one you want to see?"

Pulcher took the letter from Judge Pegrim out of his pocket and examined the list of his new clients. Avery Foltis, Walter Hopgood, Jimmy Lasser, Sam Schlesterman, Bourke Smith, Madeleine Gaultry. None of the names meant anything to him.

"I'll take Foltis first," he guessed, and followed the turnkey to a cell.

The Foltis boy was homely, pimply and belligerent. "Cripes," he complained shrilly, "are you the best they can do for me?"

Pulcher took his time answering. The boy was not very lovable; but, he reminded himself, there was a fifty-dollar retainer from the county for each one of these defendants, and conditions being what they were, Pulcher could easily grow to love three hundred dollars.

"Don't give me a hard time," he said amiably. "I may not be the best lawyer in the Galaxy, but I'm the one you've got."

"Cripes."

"Tell me what happened. All I know is that you're accused of conspiracy to commit a felony, specifically an act of kidnapping a minor child."

"Yeah, that's it," the boy agreed. "You want to know what happened?" He bounced to his feet, then began acting out his story. "We were starving to death, see?" Arms clutched pathetically around his belly. "The Icicle Works closed down. Cripes, I walked the streets nearly a year, looking for something to do. Anything." Marching in place. "I even rented out for a while, but — that didn't work out." Scowling and fingering his pimply face.

Pulcher nodded. Even a body-renter had to have some qualifications. The most important one was a good-looking, disease-free, strong and agile physique.

"So we got together and decided, the hell, there was money to be made hooking old Swinburne's son. So I guess we talked too much. They caught us." The boy gripped his wrists, like manacles.

Pulcher asked a few more questions, and then interviewed two of the other boys. He learned nothing he hadn't already known. The six youngsters had planned a reasonably competent kidnapping, and talked about it where they could be heard, and if there was any hope of getting them off, it did not make itself visible to their court-appointed attorney.

PULCHER left the jail and went up the street to see Charley Dickon.

The committeeman was watch-

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ing a three-way wrestling match on a flickery old TV set.

"How'd it go, Milo?" he greeted the lawyer, keeping his eyes on the wrestling.

Pulcher said: "I'm not going to get them off, Charley."

"Oh? Too bad." Dickon looked away from the set for the first time. "Why not?"

"They admitted the whole thing. Handwriting made the Hopgood boy on the ransom note. The others had fingerprints and cell-types all over the place. And besides, they talked too much."

Dickon said with a spark of interest: "What about Tim Lasser's son?"

"Sorry."

The committeeman looked thoughtful.

"I can't help it, Charley," the lawyer protested.

The kids hadn't been even routinely careful. When they planned to kidnap the son of the mayor, they had talked it over, quite loudly, in a juke joint. The waitress habitually taped everything that went on in her booths. Pulcher suspected a thriving blackmail business, but that didn't change the fact that there was enough on tape to show premeditation.

The kids had picked the mayor's son up at school. He had come with them perfectly willingly — the girl, Madeleine Gaultry, had been a babysitter for him. The boy was only three years old, but he couldn't miss an easy identification like that. And there was more: the ransom note had been sent special delivery, and young Foltis had asked the post office clerk to put the postage on instead of using the automatic meter. The clerk remembered the pimply face very well indeed.

"You'd think they *wanted* to get caught," Pulcher complained.

The committeeman sat politely while Pulcher explained, though it was obvious that most of his attention was on the snowy TV screen. "Well, Milo, that's the way it goes. Anyway, you got a fast three-hundred, hey? And that reminds me."

Pulcher's guard went up.

"Here," said the committeeman, rummaging through his desk. He brought out a couple of pale green tickets. "You ought to get out and meet more people. The Party's having its annual Chester A. Arthur Day Dinner next week. Bring your girl."

"I don't have a girl," said Pulcher.

"Oh, you'll find one. Fifteen dollars per," the committeeman said, handing over the tickets.

Pulcher sighed and paid. Well, that was what kept the wheels oiled. And Dickon had suggested his name to Judge Pegrim. Thirty dollars out of three hundred still left him a better week's pay than he had had since the Icicle Works folded.

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The committeeman carefully folded the bills into his pocket, with Pulcher watching gloomily. Dickon was looking prosperous, all right. There was easily a couple of thousand in that wad. Pulcher supposed that Dickon had been caught along with everybody else on the planet when the Icicle Works folded. Nearly everybody owned stock in it, and certainly Charley Dickon, whose politician brain got him a piece of nearly every major enterprise on Altair Nine — a big clump of stock in the Tourist Agency, a sizable share of the Mining Syndicate — certainly he would have had at least a few thousand in the Icicle Works. But it hadn't hurt him much.

Dickon said, "None of my business, but why don't you take that girl — that Madeleine Gaultry?"

"She's in jail."

"Get her out. Here." He tossed over a bondsman's card.

Pulcher pocketed it with a scowl. That would cost another forty bucks, he estimated; the bondsman would naturally be one of Dickon's club members.

Pulcher noticed that Dickon was looking strangely puzzled. "What's the matter?"

"Like I say, it's none of my business. But I don't get it. You and the girl have a fight?"

"Fight? I don't even know her."

"She said you did."

"Me? No. I don't know . . . Wait a minute! Is Gaultry her married name? Did she used to be at the Icicle Works?"

Dickon nodded. "Didn't you see her?"

"I didn't get to the women's wing at the jail. I—" Pulcher stood up, oddly flustered. "Say, I'd better run along, Charley. This bondsman, he's open now? Well—" He stopped babbling and left.

Madeleine Gaultry! Only her name had been Madeleine Cossett. It was funny that she should turn up now — in jail and, Pulcher abruptly realized, likely to stay there indefinitely. But he put that thought out of his mind. First he wanted to see her.

THE snow was turning lavender now. Pink snow, green snow, lavender snow — any color of the pastel rainbow. It was nothing unusual. That was what had made Altair Nine worth colonizing in the first place.

Now, of course, it was only a way of getting your feet wet.

Pulcher waited impatiently at the turnkey's office while the turnkey shambled over to the women's wing and, slowly, returned with the girl. She and Pulcher looked at each other. She didn't speak. Pulcher opened his mouth, closed it, and silently took her by the elbow. He steered her out of the jail and hailed a cab. That was an extravagance, but he didn't care.

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Madeleine shrank into a corner of the cab, looking at him out of blue eyes that were large and shadowed. She wasn't hostile. She wasn't afraid. She was only remote.

"Hungry?"

She nodded.

Pulcher gave the cab driver the name of a restaurant. Another extravagance, but he didn't mind the prospect of cutting down on lunches. He had had enough practice at it.

A year before, this girl had been the prettiest secretary in the pool at the Icicle Works. He dated her half a dozen times. There was a company rule against it, but the first time it was a kind of schoolboy's prank, breaking the headmaster's regulations, and the other times it was a driving need. Then—

Then came the Gumpert Process.

That was the killer, the Gumpert Process. Whoever Gumpert was. All anybody at the Icicle Works knew was that someone named Gumpert (back on Earth, one rumor said; another said he was a colonist in the Sirian system) had come up with a cheap, practical method of synthesizing the rainbow antibiotic molds that floated free in Altair Nine's air, coloring its precipitation and more important, providing a priceless export commodity. The Galaxy had depended on those rainbow molds, shipped in frozen suspensions to every inhabited planet by Altamycin, Inc. — the proper name for what everyone on Altair Nine called the Icicle Works.

When the Gumpert Process came along, suddenly the demand vanished.

Worse, the jobs vanished.

Pulcher had been on the corporation's legal staff, with an office of his own and a faint hint of a vice-presidency someday. He was out. The stenos in the pool, all but two or three of the five hundred who once had handled the correspondence and the bills, they were out. The shipping clerks in the warehouse were out, the pumphands at the settling tanks were out, the freezer attendants were out. Everyone was out. The plant closed down.

There were more than fifty tons of frozen antibiotics in storage and, though there might still be a faint trickle of orders from old-fashioned diehards around the Galaxy (backwoods country doctors who didn't believe in the new-fangled synthetics, experimenters who wanted to run comparative tests), the shipments already en route would much more than satisfy them.

Fifty tons? Once the Icicle Works had shipped three hundred tons a day — physical transport, electronic rockets that took years to cover the distance between stars. The boom was over. And of course, on a one-industry planet, everything else was over too.

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Pulcher took the girl by the arm and swept her into the restaurant.

"Eat," he ordered. "I know what jail food is like."

He sat down, firmly determined to say nothing until she had finished.

BUT he couldn't. Long before she was ready for coffee, he burst out: "Why, Madeleine? Why would you get into something like this?"

She looked at him but did not answer.

"What about your husband?" Pulcher didn't want to ask it, but he had to. That had been the biggest of all the unpleasant blows that had struck him after the Icicle Works closed. Just as he was getting a law practice going — not on any big scale but, through Charley Dickon and the Party, a small, steady handout of political favors that would make it possible for him to pretend he was still an attorney --the gossip reached him that Madeleine Cossett had married.

The girl pushed her plate away. "He emigrated."

Pulcher digested that slowly. Emigrated? That was the dream of every Niner since the Works closed down. But it was only a dream. Physical transport between the stars was ungodly expensive. More, it was ungodly slow. Ten years would get you to Dell, the thin-aired planet of a chilly little red dwarf. The nearest *good* planet was thirty years away.

What it all added up to was that emigrating was almost like dying. If one member of a married couple emigrated, it meant the end of the marriage.

"We got a divorce," said Madeleine, nodding. "There wasn't enough money for both of us to go, and Jon was unhappier here than I was."

She took out a cigarette and let him light it. "You don't want to ask me about Jon, do you? But you want to know. All right. Jon was an artist. He was in the advertising department at the Works, but that was just temporary. He was going to do something big. Then the bottom dropped out for him, just as it did for all of us. Well, Milo, I didn't hear from you."

Pulcher protested: "It wouldn't have been *fair* for me to see you when I didn't have a job or anything."

"Of course you'd think that. But I couldn't find you to tell you it was wrong, and then Jon was very persistent. He was tall, curly-haired, he had a baby's face — do you know, he only shaved twice a week! Well, I married him. It lasted three months. Then he just had to get away."

She leaned forward earnestly. "Don't think he was just a bum, Milo! He really was quite a good artist. But we didn't have enough

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money for paints, even, and then it seems that the colors are all wrong here. Jon explained it. In order to paint landscapes that sell, you have to be on a planet with Earth-type colors. They're all the vogue. And there's too much altamycin in the clouds here."

Pulcher said stiffly, "I see." But he didn't, really. There was at least one unexplained part. If there hadn't been enough money for paint, then where had the money come from for a starship ticket, physical transport? It meant at least ten thousand dollars. There just was no way to raise ten thousand dollars on Altair Nine, not without taking a rather extreme step . . .

The girl wasn't looking at him.

Her eyes were fixed on a table across the restaurant, a table with a loud, drunken party. It was only lunch time, but they had a three-o'clock-in-the-morning air about them. They were *stinking*. There were four of them, two men and two women, and their physical bodies were those of young, healthy, quite goodlooking, perfectly normal Niners. The appearance of the physical bodies was entirely irrelevant, though, because they were tourists. Around the neck of each of them was a bright golden choker with a glowing red signal-jewel in the middle — the mark of the Tourist Agency — the sign that the bodies were rented.

Milo Pulcher looked away quickly. His eyes stopped on the white face of the girl, and now he knew how she had raised the money to send Jon to another world.

II

PULCHER found the girl a room and left her there, though that was not what he wanted. What he wanted was to spend the evening with her and to go on spending time with her, until time came to an end. But there was the matter of her trial.

Twenty-four hours ago he had got the letter notifying him that the court had appointed him attorney for six suspected kidnappers and looked on it as a fast fee, no work to speak of, no hope for success. He would lose the case, certainly. Well, what of it?

But now he wanted to win!

It meant some fast, hard work if he was to have even a chance — and at best, he admitted to himself, the chance would not be good. Still, he wasn't going to give up without a try.

The snow stopped as he located the home of Jimmy Lasser's parents. It was a sporting goods shop, not far from the main Tourist Agency; it had a window full of guns and boots and scuba gear. He walked in, tinkling a bell as he opened the door.

"Mr. Lasser?"

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A plump little man, leaning back in a chair by the door, got slowly up, looking Pulcher over.

"In back," he said shortly.

He led Pulcher behind the store, to a three-room apartment. The living room was comfortable enough, but for some reason it seemed unbalanced. One side was somehow heavier than the other. Pulcher noticed the nap of the rug, still flattened out where something heavy had been, something rectangular and large, about the size of a Tri-V electronic entertainment unit.

"Repossessed," said Lasser. "Sit down. Dickon called you a minute ago."

"Oh?" It had to be something important. Dickon wouldn't have tracked him down for any trivial matter.

"Don't know what he wanted, but he said you weren't to leave till he called back. Sit down. May'll bring you a cup of tea."

Pulcher chatted while the woman fussed over a teapot and a plate of soft cookies. He was trying to get the feel of the home. He could understand Madeleine Gaultry's desperation. He could understand the Foltis boy, a misfit in any society anywhere. What about Jimmy Lasser?

The elder Lassers were both pushing sixty. They were first-generation Niners, off an Earth colonizing ship. They hadn't been born on Earth, of course — the trip took nearly a hundred years, physical transport. They had been born in transit, had married on the ship. As the ship had reached maximum population level shortly after they were born, they were allowed to have no children until they landed. At that time they were about forty.

May Lasser said suddenly: "Please help our boy, Mr. Pulcher! It isn't Jimmy's fault. He got in with a bad crowd. You know how it is, no work, nothing for a boy to do."

"I'll do my best."

BUT it was funny, Pulcher thought, how it was always "the crowd" that was bad. It was never Jimmy — and never Avery, never Sam, never Walter.

Pulcher sorted out the five boys and remembered Jimmy: nineteen years old, quite colorless, polite, not very interested. What had struck the lawyer about him was only surprise that this rabbity boy should have the enterprise to get into a criminal conspiracy in the first place.

"He's a good boy," said May Lasser pathetically. "That trouble with the parked cars two years ago wasn't his fault. He got a fine job right after that, you know. Ask his probation officer. Then the Icicle Works closed—" She poured more tea, slopping it over the side of the cup. "Oh, sorry! But — but when he went to the unemployment office

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Mr. Pulcher, do you know what they said to him?"

"I know," said Pulcher.

"They asked him would he take a job if offered," she hurried on, unheeding. "A *job*. As if I didn't know what they meant by a job! They meant *renting!*" She plumped the teapot down on the table and began to weep. "Mr. Pulcher, I wouldn't let him rent if I died for it! There isn't anything in the Bible that says you can let someone else use your body and not be responsible for what it does! You know what tourists do! 'If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off.' It doesn't say, 'Unless somebody else is using it.' Mr. Pulcher, renting is a *sin!*"

"May." Mr. Lasser put his teacup down and looked directly at Pulcher. "What about it? Can you get Jimmy off?"

The attorney reflected. He hadn't known about Jimmy Lasser's probation before. If the county prosecutor was holding out on information of that sort, it meant he wasn't willing to cooperate. Probably he would be trying for a conviction with maximum sentence. Of course, he didn't have to tell a defense attorney anything about the previous criminal records of his clients. But in a juvenile case, where all parties were usually willing to go easy on the defendants, it was customary . . .

"I don't know, Mr. Lasser," Pulcher said. "I'll do the best I can."

"Damn right you will!" barked Lasser. "Dickon tell you who I am? I was committeeman here before him, you know. So get busy. Pull strings. Dickon will back you or I'll know why!"

Pulcher managed to control himself. "I'll do the best I can. I already told you that. If you want strings pulled, you'd better talk to Dickon yourself. I only know law. I don't know anything about politics."

The atmosphere was becoming unpleasant. Pulcher was glad to hear the ringing of the phone in the store outside. May Lasser answered it and said: "For you, Mr. Pulcher. Charley Dickon."

Pulcher gratefully picked up the phone. Dickon's rich, political voice said sorrowfully: "Milo? Listen, I been talking to Judge Pegrim's secretary. He isn't gonna let the kids off with a slap on the wrist. There's a lot of heat from the mayor's office."

PULCHER protested desperately: "But the Swinburne kid wasn't hurt! He got better care with Madeleine than he was getting at home."

"I know, Milo," the committeeman agreed, "but that's the way it is. So what I wanted to say to you, Milo, is don't knock yourself out on this one, because you aren't going to win it."

"But—" Pulcher suddenly be-

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came aware of the Lassers just behind him. "But I think I can get an acquittal," he said, entirely out of hope, knowing that it wasn't true.

Dickon chuckled. "You got Lasser breathing down your neck? Sure, Milo. But you want my advice, you'll take a quick hearing, let them get sentenced and then try for executive clemency in a couple months. I'll help you get it. And that's another five hundred or so for you, see?"

The committeeman was being persuasive; it was a habit of his. "Don't worry about Lasser. I guess he's been telling you what a power he is in politics here. Forget it. And, say, tell him I notice he hasn't got his tickets for the Chester A. Arthur Day Dinner yet. You pick up the dough from him, will you? I'll mail him the tickets. No — hold on, don't ask him. Just tell him what I said."

The connection went dead.

Pulcher stood holding a dead phone, conscious of Lasser standing right behind him.

"So long, Charley," he said, paused, nodded into space and said, "So long," again.

Then the attorney turned about to deliver the committeeman's message about that most important subject, the tickets to the Chester A. Arthur Day Dinner.

Lasser grumbled: "Damn Dickon. He's into you for one thing after another. Where's he think I'm going to get thirty bucks for tickets?"

"Will, please." His wife touched his arm.

Lasser hesitated. "Oh, all right. But you better get Jimmy off, hear?"

Pulcher got away at last and hurried out into the cold, slushy street.

At the corner he caught a glimpse of something palely glowing overhead and stopped, transfixed. A huge sky trout was swimming purposefully down the avenue. It was a monster, twelve feet long, at least, and more than two feet thick at the middle. It would easily go eighteen, nineteen ounces, the sort of lunker that sportsmen hiked clear across the Dismal Hills to bag. Pulcher had never in his life seen one that size. In fact, he could only remember seeing one or two fingerlings swim over inhabited areas.

It gave him a cold, worried feeling.

The sky fish were about the only tourist attraction Altair Nine had left to offer. From all over the Galaxy sportsmen came to shoot them, with their great porous flesh filled with bubbles of hydrogen, real biological zeppelins that did not fly in the air but swam it. Before human colonists arrived, they had been Altair Nine's highest form of life. They were so easy to destroy with gunfire that they had almost been exterminated in the inhabited sections. Only in the high, cold hills

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had a few survived. And now . . .

Were even the fish aware that Altair Nine was becoming a ghost planet?

THE next morning Pulcher phoned Madeleine but didn't have breakfast with her, though he wanted to very much.

He put in the whole day working on the case. In the morning he visited the families and friends of the accused boys; in the afternoon he followed a few hunches.

From the families he learned nothing. The stories were all about the same. The youngest boy was Foltis, only seventeen; the oldest was Hopgood at twenty-six. They all had lost their jobs, most of them at the Icicle Works; they saw no future, and wanted off-planet. Well, physical transport meant more money than any of them had a chance of getting in any legitimate way.

Mayor Swinburne was a rich man and his three-year-old son was the apple of his eye. It must have been an irresistible temptation to try to collect ransom money, Pulcher realized. The mayor could certainly afford it, and once the money was collected and they were aboard a starship, it would be almost impossible for the law to pursue them.

Pulcher managed to piece together the way the thing had started. The boys all lived in the same neighborhood, the neighborhood where Madeleine and Jon Gaultry had had a little apartment. They had seen Madeleine walking with the mayor's son — she had a part-time job now and then, taking care of him. The only aspect that was hard to believe was that Madeleine had been willing to take part in the scheme, once the boys approached her.

But Milo, remembering the expression on the girl's face as she looked at the tourists, decided that wasn't so strange after all.

For Madeleine had rented.

Physical transport was expensive and eternally slow.

But there was a faster way for one to travel from planet to planet — practically instantaneous, from one end of the Galaxy to the other. The pattern of the mind is electronic in nature. It can be taped, and it can be broadcast on an electromagnetic frequency. What was more, like any electromagnetic signal, it could be used to modulate an ultrawave carrier. The result: instantaneous transmission of personality, anywhere in the civilized Galaxy.

The only problem was that there had to be a receiver.

The naked ghost of a man, stripped of flesh and juices, was no more than the countless radio and other waves that passed through everyone all the time. The transmitted personality had to be given form. There were mechanical re-

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ceivers, of course — computerlike affairs with mercury memory cells — where a man's intelligence could be received, and could be made to activate robot bodies. But that wasn't *fun*. The tourist trade was built on *fun*.

Live bodies were needed to satisfy the customers. No one wanted to spend the price of a fishing trip to Altair Nine in order to find himself pursuing the quarry in some clanking tractor with photocell eyes and solenoid muscles. A body was wanted, preferably a rather attractive body; one which would be firm where the tourist's own, perhaps, was flabby, healthy where the tourist's own wheezed. Having such a body, there were other sports to enjoy than fishing.

Oh, the laws were strict about misuse of rented bodies.

But the tourist trade was the only flourishing industry left on Altair Nine. The laws remained strict, but they remained unenforced.

PULCHER checked in with Charley Dickon. "I found out why Madeleine got into this thing. She rented. Signed a long-term lease with the Tourist Agency and got a big advance on her earnings."

Dickon shook his head sadly. "What people will do for money," he commented.

"It wasn't for her! She gave it to her husband so he could get a ticket to some place off-world." Pulcher got up, turned around and kicked his chair as hard as he could. Renting was bad enough for a man. For a woman it was—

"Take it easy," Dickon suggested, grinning. "So she figured she could buy her way out of the contract with the money from Swinburne?"

"Wouldn't you do the same?"

"Oh, I don't know, Milo. Renting's not so bad."

"The hell it isn't!"

"All right, the hell it isn't. But you ought to realize, Milo," the committeeman said stiffly, "that if it wasn't for the tourist trade, we'd all be in trouble. Don't knock the Tourist Agency. They're doing a perfectly decent job."

"Then why won't they let me see the records?"

The committeeman's eyes narrowed and he sat up straighter.

"I tried," said Pulcher. "I got them to show me Madeleine's lease agreement, but not till I threatened them with a court order. Why? Then I tried to find out a little more about the Agency itself — incorporation papers, names of shareholders and so on. They wouldn't give me a thing. Why?"

Dickon said, after a second; "I could ask you that too, Milo. Why did you want to know?"

Pulcher said seriously: "I have to make a case any way I can, Charley. On the evidence, they're

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guilty. But every one of them went into this kidnapping stunt in order to stay away from renting. Maybe I can't get Judge Pegrim to listen to that kind of evidence, but maybe I can. It's my only chance. If I can show that renting is a form of cruel and unusual abuse — if I can find something wrong in it, something that isn't allowed in its charter — then I have that chance. Not a good chance, but a chance. And there's got to be something wrong, Charley, because otherwise why would they be so secretive?"

Dickon said heavily: "You're getting in pretty deep, Milo. Ever occur to you you're going about this the wrong way?"

"Wrong how?"

"What can the incorporation papers show you? You want to find out what renting's like. It seems to me the only way that makes sense is to try it yourself."

"Rent? *Me?*" Pulcher was shocked.

The committeeman shrugged. "Well, I got a lot to do," he said, and escorted Pulcher to the door.

The lawyer walked sullenly away. *Rent?* But he had to admit that there was a certain amount of sense . . .

He made a private decision. He would do what he could to get Madeleine and the others out of trouble. *Completely* out of trouble. But if, in the course of trying the case, he couldn't magic up some way of getting her out of the lease agreement as well as getting an acquittal, he would make damn sure that he didn't get the acquittal.

Jail wasn't so bad. Renting, for Madeleine Gaultry, was considerably worse.

III

NEXT morning Pulcher marched into the unemployment office with an air of determination far exceeding what he really felt. Talk about loyalty to a client! But he had spent the whole night brooding about it, and Dickon had been right.

The clerk blinked a him and wheezed: "Gee, you're Mr. Pulcher, aren't you? I never thought I'd see *you* here. Things pretty slow?"

Pulcher's uncertainty made him belligerent. "I want to rent my body. Am I in the right place or not?"

"Well, sure, Mr. Pulcher. I mean, you're not, if it's voluntary, but it's been so long since they had a voluntary that it don't make much difference, you know. I mean, I can handle it for you. Wait a minute." He turned away, hesitated, glanced at Pulcher and said: "I better use the other phone."

He was gone only a minute. He came back with a look of determined embarrassment. "Mr. Pulcher. Look. I thought I better call

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Charley Dickon. He isn't in his office. Why don't you wait until I can clear it with him?"

Pulcher said grimly: "It's already cleared with him."

The clerk hesitated. "But — Oh. All right," he said miserably, scribbling on a pad. "Right across the street. Oh, and tell them you're a volunteer. I don't know if that will make them leave the cuffs off you, but at least it'll give them a laugh."

Pulcher took the slip of paper and walked sternly across the street to the Tourist Rental Agency, Procurement Office, observing without pleasure that there were bars on the windows.

A husky guard at the door straightened up as he approached and said genially: "All right, sonny. It isn't going to be as bad as you think. Just gimme your wrists a minute."

"Wait," said Pulcher quickly, putting his hands behind him. "You won't need the handcuffs for me. I'm a volunteer."

The guard said dangerously: "Don't kid with me, sonny." Then he took a closer look. "Hey, I know you. You're the lawyer. I saw you at the Primary Dance." He scratched his ear. He said doubtfully: "Well, maybe you *are* a volunteer. Go on in."

But as Pulcher strutted past, he felt a heavy hand on his shoulder, and *click, click,* his wrists were circled with steel. He whirled.

"No hard feelings," said the guard cheerfully. "It costs a lot of dough to get you ready, that's all. They don't want you changing your mind when they give you the squeeze, see?"

"The squeeze? All right," said Pulcher, and turned away again uneasily.

The squeeze. It didn't sound so good, at that. But he had a little too much pride left to ask the guard for details. Anyway, it couldn't be *too* bad, he was sure. Wasn't he? After all, it wasn't the same as being executed.

An hour and a half later he wasn't so sure.

They had stripped him, weighed him, fluorographed him, taken samples of his blood, saliva, urine and spinal fluid; they had thumped his chest and listened to the strangled pounding of the arteries in his left arm.

"You pass," said a fortyish blonde in a stained nurse's uniform. "You're lucky today — openings all over. You can take your pick — mining, sailing, anything you like. What'll it be?"

"What?"

"While you're *renting.* What's the matter with you? You got to be doing something while your body's rented. You can have the tank if you want to, but they mostly don't like that. You're conscious the whole time, you know. It gets kind of boring otherwise."

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PULCHER said honestly: "I don't know what you're talking about."

But then he remembered. While a person's body was rented out, there was the problem of what to do with his own mind and personality. It couldn't stay in the body. It had to go somewhere else. "The tank" was a storage device, only that and nothing more; the displaced mind was held in a sort of pickling vat of transistors and cells until its own body could be returned to it. He remembered a client of his boss's, while he was still clerking, who had spent eight weeks in the tank and had then come out to commit a murder. No, not the tank.

He said, coughing: "What else is there?"

The nurse said impatiently: "Golly, whatever you want, I guess. They've got a big call for miners operating the deep gas generators right now, if you want that. It's pretty hot is all. They burn the coal into gas, and of course you're right in the middle of it. But I don't think you feel much. Not *too* much. I don't know about sailing or rocketing, because you have to have some experience for that. There might be something with the taxi company, but usually the renters don't want that, I ought to tell you, because the live drivers don't like seeing the machines running cabs. Sometimes if they see a machine-cab they tip it over. Naturally, if there's any damage to the host machine, it's risky for you."

Pulcher said faintly: "I'll try mining."

He went out of the room in a daze, a small bleached towel around his middle his only garment, and hardly aware of that. His own clothes had been whisked away and checked long ago. The tourist who would shortly wear his body would pick his own clothes; the haberdashery was one of the more profitable subsidiaries of the Tourist Agency.

Then he snapped out of his daze as he discovered what was meant by "the squeeze."

A pair of husky experts lifted him onto a slab, whisked away the towel, unlocked and tossed away the handcuffs. While one pinned him down firmly at the shoulders, the other began to turn viselike wheels that moved molded forms down upon him. It was like a sectional sarcophagus closing in on him.

Pulcher had an instant childhood recollection of some story or other — the walls closing in, the victim inexorably squeezed to death.

He yelled: "Hey, hold it! What are you doing?"

The man at his head, bored, said: "Oh, don't worry. This your first time? We got to keep you still, see? Scanning's close work."

"But—"

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"Now shut up and relax," the man said reasonably. "If you wiggle when the tracer's scanning you, you could get your whole personality messed up. Not only that, we might damage the body an' then the Agency'd have a suit on its hands, see? Tourists don't like damaged bodies . . . Come on, Vince. Get the legs lined up so I can do the head."

"But—" said Pulcher again, and then, with effort, relaxed.

It was only for one day, after all. He could stand practically anything for a day, and he had been careful to sign up for only that long.

"Go ahead," he said. "It's only for twenty-four hours."

"What? Oh, sure, friend. Lights out, now. Have a pleasant dream."

And something soft but quite firm came down over his face.

He heard a muffled sound of voices. Then there was a quick ripping feeling, as though he had been plucked out of some sticky surrounding medium.

Then it *hurt*.

Pulcher screamed. It didn't accomplish anything. He no longer had a voice to scream with.

FUNNY, he had always thought of mining as something that was carried on underground. He was under *water*. There wasn't any doubt of it. He could see vagrant eddies of sand moving in a current. He could see real fish, not the hydrogen zeppelins of the air. He could see bubbles, arising from some source in the sand at his feet—

No! Not at his feet. He didn't have feet. He had tracks.

A great steel bug swam up in front of him and said raspingly: "All right, you there, let's go."

Funny again. He didn't hear the voice with ears — he didn't have ears, and there was no binaural sense — but he did, somehow, hear. It seemed to be speaking inside his brain. Radio? Sonar?

"Come on!" growled the bug.

Experimentally, Pulcher tried to walk.

"Watch it!" squeaked a thin little voice, and a tiny, many-treaded steel beetle squirmed out from under his tracks. It paused to rear back and look at him. "Dope!" it chattered scathingly. A bright flame erupted from its snout as it squirmed away.

The big bug rasped: "Go on, follow the burner, Mac."

Pulcher thought of walking, rather desperately. Yes, something was happening. He lurched and moved.

"Oh, God," sighed the steel bug, hanging beside him, watching with critical attention. "This your first time? I figured. They *always* give me the new ones to break in. Look, that burner — the little thing that just went down the cline, Mac! That's a burner. It's going to burn the hard rock out of a new shaft.

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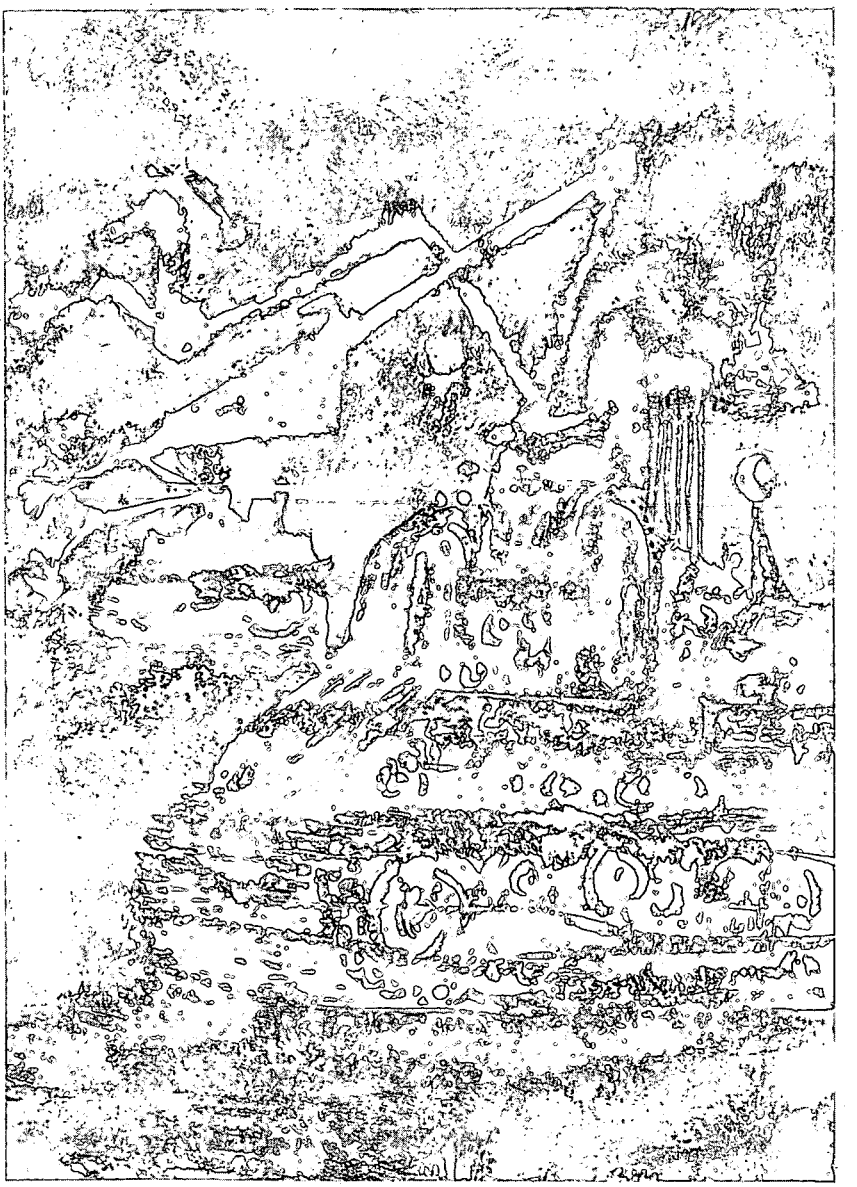

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You follow it and pull the sludge out. With your *buckets*, Mac."

Pulcher gamely started his treads and lurchingly followed the little burner. All around him, visible through the churned, silty water, he caught glimpses of other machines working. There were big ones and little ones, some with great elephantine flexible steel trunks that sucked silt and mud away, some with wasp's stingers that planted charges of explosive, some like himself with buckets for hauling and scooping out pits. The mine, whatever sort of mine it was to be, was only a bare scratched-out beginning on the sea floor as yet. It took him — an hour? a minute? he had no means of telling time— to learn the rudiments of operating his new steel body.

Then it became dull.

Also it became painful. The first few scoops of sandy grime he carried out of the new pit made his buckets tingle. The tingle became a pain, the pain an ache, the ache a blazing agony. He stopped. Something was wrong. They couldn't expect him to go on like this!

"Hey, Mac. Get busy, will you?"

"But it *hurts*."

"Godamighty, Mac, it's *supposed* to hurt. How else would you be able to feel when you hit something hard? You want to break your buckets on me, Mac?"

Pulcher gritted his not-teeth, squared his not-shoulders, and went back to digging. Ultimately the pain became, through habit, bearable. It didn't become less. It just became bearable.

IT was tiresome, except when once he did strike a harder rock than his phosphor-bronze buckets could handle, and had to slither back out of the way while the burner chopped it up for him. But that was the only break in the monotony. Otherwise the work was strictly routine. It gave him plenty of time to think.

That was not altogether a boon.

I wonder, he thought, with a drowned clash of buckets, I wonder what my body is doing now.

Perhaps the tenant who now occupied his body was a businessman, Pulcher thought prayerfully. A man who had had to come to Altair Nine quickly, on urgent business — get a contract signed, make a trading deal, arrange an interstellar loan. That wouldn't be so bad! A businessman would not damage a rented property. At the worst, a businessman might drink one or two cocktails too many, perhaps eat an indigestible lunch. All right. So when — in only a few hours now — Pulcher resumed his body, the worst he could expect would be a hangover or dyspepsia. Well, what of that? An aspirin. A dash of bicarb.

But maybe the tourist would not be a businessman.

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Pulcher flailed the coarse sand with his buckets and thought apprehensively: He might be a sportsman. Still, even that wouldn't be so bad. A sportsman might walk his body up and down a few dozen mountains, perhaps even sleep it out in the open overnight. There might be a cold, possibly even pneumonia. There might also be an accident — tourists did fall off the Dismal Hills; there could be a broken leg. But that was not *too* bad. It was only a matter of a few days' rest, a little medical attention.

But maybe, Pulcher thought grayly, ignoring the teeming agony of his buckets, maybe the tenant will be something worse.

He had heard queer, smutty stories about rented bodies, each one against the law. But you kept hearing the stories. All of them were unpleasant. And yet in a rented body, where the ultimate price of dissipation would be borne by someone else, who might not try any or all pleasures and lusts? For there was no physical consequence to the practitioner. If Mrs. Lasser was right, perhaps there was not even a consequence in the hereafter.

Twenty-four hours had never passed so slowly.

THE suction hoses squabbled with the burners. The scoops quarreled with the dynamiters. All the animate submarine mining machines constantly irritably snapped at each other. But the work was getting done.

It seemed to be a lot of work to accomplish in one twenty-four hour day, Pulcher thought wearily. The pit was down two hundred yards now, and braced. New wet-setting concrete pourers were already laying a floor. Shimmery little spider-like machines whose limbs held chemical testing equipment were now sniffing every load of sludge that came out for richness of ore. The mine was nearly ready to start producing.

After a time Pulcher began to understand the short tempers of the machines. The minds in these machines were not able to forget that, up topside, their bodies were going about unknown errands, risking unguessed dangers. At any given moment that concrete pourer's body, for instance, might be dying . . . might be acquiring a disease . . . might be stretched out in narcotic stupor, or might gayly be risking *dismemberment in a violent* sport. Naturally tempers were touchy.

There was no such thing as rest, as coffee breaks or sleep for the machines; they kept going. When finally Pulcher remembered that he had had a purpose in coming here, that it was not merely some punishment that had come blindly to him for a forgotten sin, he began

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to try to analyze his own feelings and to guess at the feelings of the others.

The whole thing seemed unnecessarily *mean*. Pulcher understood quite clearly why anyone who had had the experience of renting would never want to do it again. But why did it have to be so unpleasant? Surely conditions for the renter-mind in a machine-body could be made more bearable; the tactile sensations could be reduced from pain to some more supportable feeling without loss of sensation enough to accomplish the desired ends.

He wondered wistfully if Madeleine had once occupied this particular machine.

Then he wondered how many of the dynamiters and diggers were female, how many male. It seemed somehow wrong that their gleaming stainless-steel or phosphor-bronze exteriors should give no hint of age or sex. There ought to be some lighter work for women, he thought idly, and then realized that the thought was nonsense. What difference did it make? You could work your buckets off, and when you got back topside you'd be healthy and rested . . .

And then he had a quick dizzying qualm, as he realized that that would be the thought in the mind of the tourist now occupying his own body.

Pulcher licked his not-lips and attacked the sand with his buckets more viciously than before.

"All right, Mac." The familiar steel bug was alongside him. "Come on, back to the barn," it scolded. "You think I want to have to haul you there? Time's up. Get the tracks back in the parking lot."

Never was an order so gladly obeyed.

But the overseer had cut it rather fine. Pulcher had just reached the parking space, had not quite turned his clanking steel frame around when, *rip*, the tearing and the pain hit him . . .

And he found himself struggling against "the squeeze."

"RELAX, friend," soothed a distant voice. Abruptly the pressure was removed from his face and the voice came nearer. "There you are. Have a nice dream?"

Pulcher kicked the rubbery material off his legs. He sat up.

"Ouch!" he said suddenly, and held his eye.

The man by his head looked down at him and grinned. "Some shiner. Must've been a good party." He was stripping the sections of rubbery gripping material off Pulcher as he talked. "You're lucky. I've seen them come back in here with legs broken, teeth out, even bullet holes. Friend, you wouldn't believe me if I told you. Especially the girls." He handed Pulcher

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another bleached towel. "All right, you're through here. Don't worry about the eye, friend. That's easy two, three days old already. Another day or two and you won't even notice it."

"Hey!" Pulcher cried suddenly. "What do you mean, two or three days? How long was I down there?"

The man glanced at the green-tabbed card on Pulcher's wrist. "Let's see, this is Thursday. Six days."

"But I only signed up for twenty-four hours!"

"Sure you did. *Plus* emergency overcalls. What do you think, friend—the Agency's going to evict some big-spending tourist just because you want your body back in twenty-four hours? Can't do it. You can see that. The Agency'd lose a fortune that way."

Unceremoniously, Pulcher was hoisted to his feet and escorted to the door.

"If only these jokers would read the fine print," the first man was saying mournfully to his helper as Pulcher left. "Oh, well. If they had any brains, they wouldn't rent in the first place. Then what would me and you do for jobs?"

Six days! Pulcher raced through medical check-out, clothes redemption, payoff at the cashier's window.

"Hurry, please," he kept saying, "can't you please hurry?" He couldn't wait to get to a phone.

But he had a pretty good idea already what the phone call would tell him. Five extra days! No wonder it had seemed so long down there, while up in the city time had passed along.

He found a phone at last and quickly dialed the private number of Judge Pegrim's office. The judge wouldn't be there, but that was the way Pulcher wanted it. He didn't want to face the judge.

He got Pegrim's secretary. "Miss Kish? This is Milo Pulcher."

Her voice was cold. "So *there* you are. Where have you been? The judge was *furious*."

"I—" He despaired of explaining it to her. He could hardly explain it to himself. "I'll tell you later, Miss Kish. Please. Where does the kidnap case stand now?"

"Why, the hearing was yesterday. Since we couldn't locate you, the judge had to appoint another attorney. After all, Mr. Pulcher, an attorney is supposed to be in court when his clients are coming up for trial."

"I know that, Miss Kish. What happened?"

"It was open and shut. They all pleaded *non vult*—the whole thing was over in twenty minutes. It was the only thing to do on the evidence, you see. They'll be sentenced this afternoon—around three o'clock, I'd say. *If* you're interested."

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IV

IT was snowing again, blue this time. Pulcher paid the cab driver and ran up the steps of the courthouse. As he reached for the door, he caught sight of three air fish solemnly swimming around the corner of the building toward him. Even in his hurry, he paused to glance at them.

It was past three, but the judge had not yet entered the courtroom. There were no spectators, but the six defendants were already in their seats, a bailiff lounging next to them. Counsel's table was occupied by — Pulcher squinted — oh, by Donley. Pulcher knew the other lawyer slightly. He was a youngster, with good political connections — that explained the court's appointing him for the fee when Pulcher didn't show up — but without much to recommend him otherwise.

Madeleine Gaultry looked up as Pulcher approached, then looked away. One of the boys caught sight of him, scowled, whispered to the others. Their collective expressions were enough to sear his spirit.

Pulcher sat at the table beside Donley. "Hello. Mind if I join you?"

Donley twisted his head. "Oh, hello, Charley. Sure. I didn't expect to see you here." He laughed. "Say, that eye's pretty bad. I guess—"

He stopped.

Something happened in Donley's face. The soft young cheeks became harder, older, more worried-looking. Donley clamped his lips shut.

Pulcher was puzzled. "What's the matter? Are you wondering where I was?"

Donley said stiffly: "Well, you can't blame me for that."

"I couldn't help it, Donley. I was renting. I was trying to gather evidence — not that that helps much now. I found one thing out, though. Even a lawyer can goof in reading a contract. Did you know the Tourist Agency has the right to retain a body for up to forty-five days, regardless of the original agreement? It's in their contract. I was lucky, I guess. They only kept me an extra five."

Donley's face did not relax. "That's interesting," he said noncommittally.

The man's attitude was most peculiar. Pulcher could understand being needled by Donley — could even understand this coldness if it had been from someone else — but it wasn't like Donley to take mere negligence so seriously.

But before he could try to pin down exactly what was wrong, the other lawyer stood up. "On your feet, Pulcher," he said in a stage whisper. "Here comes the judge!"

Pulcher jumped up.

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He could feel Judge Pegrim's eyes rake over him. They scratched like diamond-tipped drills. In an ordinarily political, reasonably corrupt community, Judge Pegrim was one man who took his job seriously and expected the same from those around him.

"Mr. Pulcher," he purred. "We're honored to have you with us."

Pulcher began an explanation, but the judge waved it away. "Mr. Pulcher, you do know, don't you, that an attorney is an officer of the court? And, as such, is expected to know his duties — and to fulfill them?"

"Well, Your Honor, I thought I was fulfilling them. I—"

"I'll discuss it with you at another time, Mr. Pulcher," the judge said. "Right now we have a rather disagreeable task to get through. Bailiff! Let's get started."

Donley made a couple of routine motions, but there was no question about what would happen. It happened. Each of the defendants drew a ten-year sentence. The judge pronounced it distastefully, adjourned the court and left. He did not look at Milo Pulcher.

Pulcher tried for a moment to catch Madeleine's eye. Then he succeeded. Shaken, he turned away, bumping into Donley.

"I don't understand it," he mumbled.

"What don't you understand?"

"Well, don't you think that's a pretty stiff sentence?"

Donley shrugged. He wasn't very interested. Pulcher scanned the masklike young face. There was no sympathy there. It was weird in a way. This was a face of flint; the plight of six young people, each doomed to spend a decade of their lives in prison, did not move him at all.

Pulcher said dispiritedly: "I think I'll go see Dickon."

"Do that," said Donley curtly, and turned away.

BUT Pulcher couldn't find Dickon. He wasn't at his office, wasn't at the club.

"Nope," said the garrulous retired police lieutenant who was the club president — and used the club headquarters as a checker salon. "I haven't seen him in a couple of days. Be at the dinner tonight, though. You'll see him there."

It wasn't a question, whether Pulcher would be at the dinner or not; Pop Craig knew he would. After all, Dickon had passed the word out. *Everybody* would be there.

Pulcher went back to his apartment.

It was the first time he had surveyed his body since reclaiming it. The bathroom mirror told him that he had a gorgeous shiner indeed. Also certain twinges made

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him strip and examine his back. It looked, he thought gloomily, staring over his shoulder into the mirror, as though whoever had rented his body had had a perfectly marvelous time. He made a mental note to get a complete checkup someday soon, just in case. Then he showered, shaved, talcumed around the black eye without much success, and dressed.

He sat down, poured himself a drink and promptly forgot it was there. Something was trying to reach the surface of his mind. Something perfectly obvious that he all the same couldn't quite put his finger on. It was annoying.

He found himself drowsily thinking of air fish.

Damn, he thought grouchily, his body's late tenant hadn't even troubled to give it a decent night's sleep! But he didn't want to sleep, not now. It was still only early evening. He supposed the Chester A. Arthur Day dinner was still a must, but there were hours yet before that.

He got up, poured the untasted drink into the sink and set out. There was one thing he could try to help Madeleine. It probably wouldn't work. But nothing else would either, so that was no reason for not trying it.

THE mayor's mansion was ablaze with light; something was going on.

Pulcher trudged up the long, circling driveway in slush that kept splattering his ankles. He tapped gingerly on the door.

The butler took his name doubtfully and isolated Pulcher in a contagion-free sitting room while he went off to see if the mayor would care to admit such a person. He came back looking incredulous. The mayor would.

Mayor Swinburne was a healthy lean man of medium height, showing only by his thinning hair that he was in his middle forties.

Pulcher said: "Mr. Mayor, I guess you know who I am. I represent the six kids who were accused of kidnapping your son."

"Not accused, Mr. Pulcher. Convicted. And I didn't know you still represented them."

"I see you know the score. All right. Maybe, in a legal sense, I don't represent them any more. But I'd like to make some representations on their behalf to you tonight — entirely unofficially." He gave the mayor a crisply worded, brief outline of what had happened in the case, how he had rented, what he had found as a renter, why he had missed the hearing. "You see, sir, the Tourist Agency doesn't give its renters even ordinary courtesy. They're just bodies, nothing else. I can't blame those kids. Now that I've rented myself, I'll have to say that I wouldn't blame anybody who did *anything* to avoid it."

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The mayor said dangerously: "Mr. Pulcher, I don't have to remind you that what's left of our economy depends heavily on the Tourist Agency for income. Also that some of our finest citizens are among its shareholders."

"Including yourself, Mr. Mayor. Right." Pulcher nodded. "But the management may not be reflecting your wishes. I'll go further. I think, sir, that every contract the Tourist Agency holds with a renter ought to be voided as against public policy. Renting out one's body for a purpose which well may be in violation of law — which, going by experience, nine times out of ten *does* involve a violation of law — is the same thing as contracting to perform any other illegal act. The contract simply cannot be enforced. The common law gives us a great many precedents on this point, and—"

"Please, Mr. Pulcher. I'm not a judge. If you feel so strongly, why not take it to court?"

PULCHER sank back into his chair, deflated. "There isn't time," he admitted. "Besides, it's too late for that to help the six persons I'm interested in. They've already been driven into an even more illegal act in order to escape renting. I'm only trying to explain it to you, sir, because you are their only hope. You can pardon them."

The mayor's face turned beet red. "Executive clemency from me — for *them?*"

"They didn't hurt your boy."

"No, they did not," the mayor agreed. "And I'm sure that Mrs. Gaultry, at least, would not willingly have done so. But can you say the same of the others? Could she have prevented it?" He stood up. "I'm sorry, Mr. Pulcher. The answer is no. Now you must excuse me."

Pulcher hesitated, then accepted the dismissal. There wasn't anything else to do.

He walked somberly down the hall toward the entrance, hardly noticing that guests were beginning to arrive. Apparently the mayor was offering cocktails to a select few. He recognized some of the faces — Lew Yoder, the county tax assessor for one; probably the mayor was having some of the white-collared politicians in for drinks before making the obligatory appearance at Dickon's fund-raising dinner. Pulcher looked up long enough to nod grayly at Yoder and walked on.

"Charley Dickon! What the devil are you doing here like that?"

Pulcher jerked upright. Dickon here? He looked around.

But Dickon was not in sight. Only Yoder was coming down the corridor toward him, was looking straight at him! And it had been Yoder's voice.

Yoder's face froze.

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The expression on Yoder's face was a peculiar one, but not unfamiliar to Milo Pulcher. He had seen it once before, that day. It was the identical expression he had seen on the face of that young squirt who had replaced him in court, Donley.

Yoder said awkwardly: "Oh, Milo, it's you. I, uh, thought you were Charley Dickon."

Pulcher felt the hairs at the back of his neck tingle. Something was odd here. Very odd.

"It's a perfectly natural mistake," he said. "I'm six feet tall and Charley's five feet seven. I'm thirty-one years old and he's fifty. I'm dark and he's almost bald. I don't know how anybody ever tells us apart."

"What the devil are you talking about?" Yoder blustered.

Pulcher looked at him thoughtfully for a second. "I'm not sure. Are you?" Yoder spun and walked angrily away.

V

SOME things never change. Across the entrance to the New Metropolitan Cafe & Men's Grille, a long scarlet banner carried the words: VOTE THE STRAIGHT TICKET! Big poster portraits of the mayor and Committeeman Dickon flanked the door itself. A squat little sound truck parked outside the door blared ancient marches of the sort that political conventions had suffered through for more than two centuries back on Earth.

It was an absolutely conventional political fund-raising dinner. It would have the absolutely conventional embalmed roast beef, the one conventionally free watery Manhattan at each place and the conventionally boring after-dinner speeches. (Except for one.)

Milo Pulcher, stamping about in the slush outside the entrance, looked up at the constellations visible from Altair Nine and wondered if those same stars were looking down on just such another thousand dinners all over the Galaxy. Politics went on wherever you were. The constellations would be different, to be sure; the Squirrel and the Nut were local stars and would have no shape at all from any other solar system. But . . .

He caught sight of the tall, thin figure he was waiting for and stepped out into the stream of small-time political workers, ignoring their greetings. "Judge. I'm glad you came."

Judge Pegrim said frostily: "I gave you my word, Milo. But you've got a lot to answer for if this is a false alarm. I don't ordinarily attend partisan political affairs."

"It isn't an ordinary affair, Judge."

Pulcher conducted him into the room and sat him at the table he had prepared. Once it had held

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place cards for four election-board workers from the warehouse district, who now buzzed from table to table angrily; Pulcher had filched their cards.

The judge was grumbling: "It doesn't comport well with the bench to attend this sort of thing, Milo. I don't like it."

"I know, Judge. You're an honest man. That's why I wanted you here."

"Mmm."

Pulcher left him before the *Mmm* could develop into a question. He had fended off enough questions since the thoughtful half-hour he had spent pacing back and forth in front of the mayor's mansion. He didn't want to fend off any more. As he skirted the tables, heading for the private room where he had left his special guests, Dickon caught his arm.

"Hey, Milo! I see you got the judge out. Good boy! He's just what we needed to make this dinner complete."

"Complete—yes, I hope so," said Pulcher and went on. He didn't look back. There was another fine potential question-source; and the committeeman's would be even more difficult to answer than the judge's. Besides, he wanted to see Madeleine.

The girl and her five accomplices were where he had left them. The private bar where they were sitting was never used for affairs like this. You couldn't see the floor from it. Still, you could hear well enough, and that was more important.

The boys were showing nervousness in their different ways. Although they had been convicted hardly more than a day, had been sentenced only a few hours, they had fallen quickly into the convict habit. Being out on bail so abruptly was a surprise. They hadn't expected it. It made them edgy. Young Foltis was jittering about to himself. The Hopgood boy was slumped despondently in a corner, blowing smoke rings. Jimmy Lasser was making a castle out of sugar cubes.

Only Madeleine was relaxed.

As Pulcher came in, she looked up calmly.

"Is everything all right?"

He crossed his fingers and nodded.

"Don't worry," she said.

Pulcher blinked. *Don't worry.* It should have been he who was saying that to her, not the other way around. It came to him that there was only one possible reason for her quiet confidence.

She trusted him.

BUT he couldn't stay. The ballroom was full now, and irritable banquet waiters were crashing plates down in front of the loyal Party workers. He had a couple of last-minute things to attend to. He carefully avoided the

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eye of Judge Pegrim, militantly alone at the table by the speaker's dais and walked quickly across the room to Jimmy Lasser's father.

He said without preamble: "Do you want to help your son?"

Phil Lasser snarled: "You cheap shyster! You wouldn't even show up for the trial! Where do you get the nerve to ask me a question like that?"

"Shut up. Do you or don't you?"

Lasser hesitated, then read something in Pulcher's eyes. "Well, of course I do," he grumbled.

"Then tell me something. It won't sound important, but it is. How many rifles did you sell in the past year?"

Lasser looked puzzled, but he said. "Not many. Maybe half a dozen. Business is lousy all over, you know, since the Icicle Works closed."

"And in a normal year?"

"Oh, three or four hundred. It's a big tourist item. You see, they need cold-shot rifles for hunting the air fish. A regular bullet'll set them on fire—touches off the hydrogen. I'm the only sporting-goods merchant in town that carries them and — say, what does that have to do with Jimmy?"

Pulcher took a deep breath. "Stick around and you'll find out. Meanwhile, think about what you just told me. If rifles are a tourist item, why did closing the Icicle Works hurt your sales?"

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He left.

But not quickly enough. Dickon scuttled over and clutched his arm, his face furious. "Milo, what the hell! I just heard from Sam Apfel — the bondsman — that you got that whole bunch out of jail again on bail. How come?"

"They're my clients."

"Don't give me that! How could you get them out when they're convicted, anyway?"

"I'm going to appeal the case," Pulcher said.

"You don't have a leg to stand on! Why would Pegrim grant bail?"

Pulcher pointed to Judge Pegrim's solitary table. "Ask him," he invited, and broke away.

He was burning a great many bridges behind him, he knew. It was an exhilarating feeling. Chancy but tingly; he decided he liked it. There was just one job to do. As soon as he was clear of the committeeman, he walked by a circular route to the dais. Dickon was walking back to his table, turned away from the dais; Pulcher's chance would never be better.

"Hello, Pop," he said.

Pop Craig looked up over his glasses. "Oh, Milo. I've been going over the list. You think I got everybody? Dickon wanted me to introduce all the block captains and anybody else important. You know anybody important that ain't on this list?"

"That's what I wanted to tell you, Pop. Dickon said for you to give me a few minutes. I want to say a few words."

Craig said agitatedly: "Aw, Milo, if you make a speech, they're all gonna want to make speeches! What do you want to make a speech for? You're no candidate."

Pulcher winked mysteriously. "What about next year?" he asked archly, with a lying inference.

"Oh. Oh-*ho*." Pop Craig nodded and returned to his list, mumbling. "Well. In *that* case. I guess I can fit you in after the block captains, or maybe after the man from the Sheriff's office—"

But Pulcher wasn't listening. He was already on his way back to the little private bar.

MAN had conquered all of space within nearly fifty light-years of dull, yellow old Sol, but out in that main ballroom political hacks were talking of long-dead heads of almost forgotten countries centuries in the past. Pulcher was content to listen — to allow the sounds to vibrate his eardrums, at least, for the words made little sense to him. If, indeed, there was any content of sense to a political speech in the first place. But they were soothing.

Also they kept his six fledglings from bothering him with questions. Madeleine sat quietly by his shoulder, quite relaxed still and

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smelling faintly, pleasantly, of some floral aroma. It was, all in all, as pleasant a place to be as Pulcher could remember in his recent past. It was too bad that he would have to go out of it soon.

Very soon.

The Featured Guest had droned through his platitudes. The Visiting Celebrities had said their few words each.

Pop Craig's voluminous old voice took over again. "And now I wanta introduce some of the fine Party workers from our local districts. There's Keith Ciccarelli from the Hillside area. Keith, stand up and take a bow!" Dutiful applause. "And here's Mary Beth Whitehurst, head of the Women's Club from Riverview!" Dutiful applause — and a whistle. Surely the whistle was sardonic; Mary Beth was fat and would never again see fifty. There were more names.

Pulcher felt it coming. He was on his way to the dais even before Craig droned out: "That fine young attorney and loyal Party man — the kind of young fellow our Party needs — Milo Pulcher!"

Dutiful applause again. That was habit, but Pulcher felt the whispering question that fluttered around the room.

He didn't give the question a chance to grow. He glanced once at the five hundred loyal Party faces staring up at him and began to speak.

"Mr. President. Mr. Mayor. Justice Pegrim. Honored Guests. Ladies and gentlemen." That was protocol. He paused. "What I have to say to you tonight is in the way of a compliment. It's a surprise for an old friend, sitting right here. That old friend is — Charles Dickon." He threw the name at them. It was a special political sort of delivery, a tone of voice that commanded: *Clap now.*

They clapped. That was important, because it made it difficult for Charley to think of an excuse to interrupt him — as soon as Charley realized he ought to, which would be shortly.

"Way out here, on the bleak frontier of interstellar space, we live isolated lives, ladies and gentlemen."

There were whispers; he could hear them. The words were more or less right, but he didn't have the right political accent; the audience knew there was something wrong. The true politician would have said: *This fine, growing frontier in the midst of interstellar space's greatest constellations.* He couldn't help it; he would have to rely on velocity now to get him through.

"How isolated, we sometimes need to reflect. We have trade relations through the Icicicle Works — now closed. We have tourists in both directions, through the Tourist Agency. We have ultra-wave messages — also through

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the Tourist Agency. And that's about all.

"That's a very thin link, ladies and gentlemen. *Very* thin. And I'm here to tell you tonight that it would be even thinner if it weren't for my old friend there — yes, Committeeman Charley Dickon"

HE punched the name again and got the applause — but it was puzzled and died away early.

"The fact of the matter, ladies and gentlemen, is that just about every tourist that's come to Altair Nine this past year is the personal responsibility of Charley Dickon. Who have these tourists been? They haven't been businessmen — there's no business. They haven't been hunters — ask Phil Lasser over there; he hasn't sold enough fishing equipment to put in your eye. Ask yourselves, for that matter. How many of you have seen air fish right over the city? Do you know why? Because they aren't being hunted any more! There aren't any tourists to hunt them."

The time had come to give it to them straight. "The fact of the matter, ladies and gentlemen, is that the tourists we've had haven't been tourists at all. They've been from right here on Altair Nine. Some of them are in this room! I know that because I rented myself for a few days — and do you know who took my body? Why, Charley Dickon did. Charley Dickon himself rented my body!"

He was watching Lew Yoder out of the corner of his eye. The assessor's face turned gray; he seemed to shrink. Pulcher enjoyed the sight, though he had a certain debt to Lew Yoder; it was Yoder's slip of the tongue that had finally started him thinking on the right track.

He went on hastily: "And what it all adds up to, ladies and gentlemen, is that Charley Dickon and a handful of his friends in high places — most of them right here in this room — have cut off communication between Altair Nine and the rest of the Galaxy!"

There were yells, and the loudest yell came from Charley Dickon. "Throw him out! Arrest him! Craig, get the sergeant-at-arms! I don't have to sit here and listen to this maniac!"

"And I say you do!" said the cold courtroom voice of Judge Pegrim. The judge stood up. "Go on, Pulcher!" he ordered. "I came here tonight to hear what you have to say. It may be wrong. It may be right. I propose to hear all of it before I make up my mind."

Thank heaven for the cold old judge! Pulcher cut right in before Dickon could find a new point of attack; there wasn't much left to say anyway. "The story is simple, ladies and gentlemen. The Icicle Works was the most profitable corporation in the Galaxy. We all

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know that. Probably everybody in this room had shares of stock. Dickon had plenty.

"But he wanted more. And he didn't want to pay for them. So he used his connection with the Tourist Agency to cut off communication between Nine and the rest of the Galaxy. He spread the word that Altamycin was worthless now because some fictitious character had invented a cheap new substitute. He closed down the Icicle Works. And for the last twelve months he's been picking up stock for a penny on the dollar, while the rest of us starve and the Altamycin that the rest of the Galaxy needs stays right here on Altair Nine and—"

He stopped, not because he had run out of words but because no one could hear them any longer. The noises the crowd was making were no longer puzzled, they were ferocious. It figured. Apart from Dickon's immediate gang of manipulators, there was hardly a man in the room who hadn't taken a serious loss in the past year from the collapse of the Works.

It was time for the police to come rushing in, as per the phone call Judge Pegrim had made, protestingly, when Pulcher urged him to attend the dinner. They did — barely in time. They weren't needed to arrest Dickon so much as keeping him from being lynched.

MUCH later, escorting Madeleine home, Milo was still bubbling over. "I was worried about the mayor! I couldn't make up my mind whether he was in it with Dickon or not. I'm glad he wasn't, because he said he owed me a favor, and I told him how he could pay it. Executive clemency. The six of you will be free in the morning."

Madeleine said sleepily: "I'm free enough now."

"And the Tourist Agency won't be able to enforce those rental contracts any more. I talked it over with Judge — Madeleine, you're not listening."

She yawned apologetically. "It's been an exhausting day, Milo. Anyway, you can tell me all about it later. We'll have plenty of time."

"Years and years," he promised.

He stopped talking. Peeking over his shoulder at them, the cab driver grinned sentimentally. Youth, he thought. Love. He stiffened, slammed on the brakes, leaped out and raced shouting to a cab rank, where a machine-driven cab stood with its motor quaking.

It seemed like no time before there were a dozen human drivers threatening the machine, and the racket of their retribution was deafening, but Madeleine never noticed. And neither did the happiest man on Altair Nine.

— FREDERIK POHL

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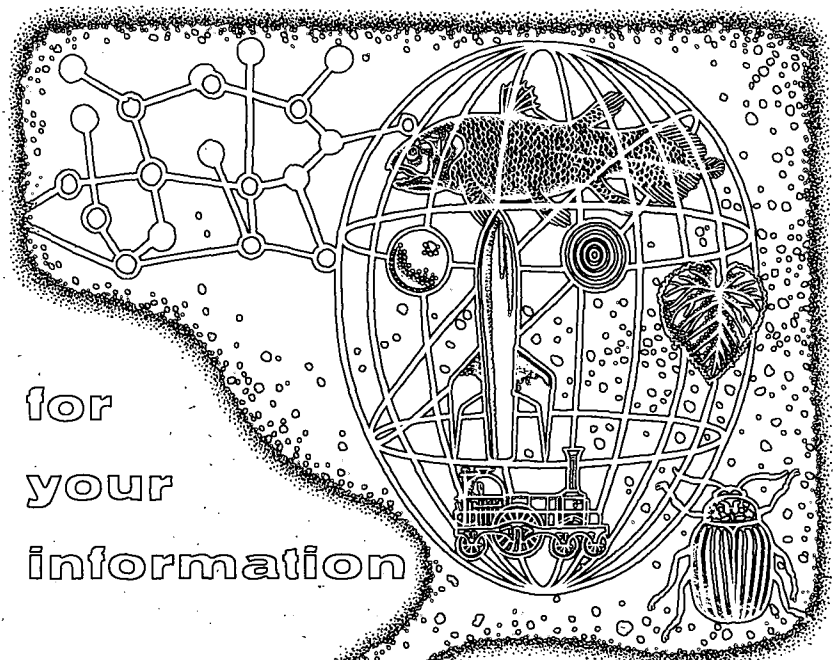

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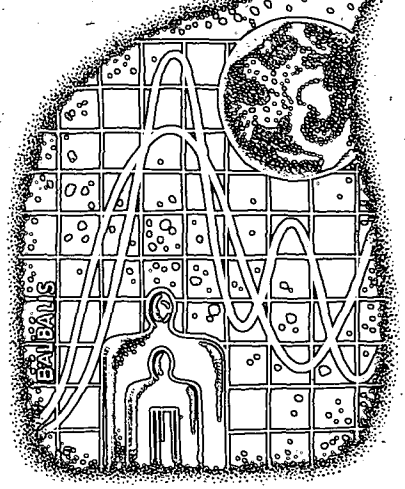

ONE PLANET, ONE LANGUAGE

I REMEMBER a time in the history of science fiction when it was taken for granted that in the near future the United Peoples of Earth would all talk one language. More, since all Earthmen would speak the same language, they would spread it through the Galaxy, or at least through our solar system. Maybe the Martian villains still whispered to each other in "low Martian" (again the same assumption: all Mars would speak one language), but when it came

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to discussing business with Earthmen and Venusians, they all spoke the Earthman's language.

Of course there is no "Earth language," but many people still feel that it would be nice if there were. And some wonder whether there will be. Well, if past history is any guide, the answer is a resounding no. Even if past history had been different, the answer would still be no.

Let us take the Roman Empire as an example. From the north shore of Africa to the *Limes* in West Germany and to the "Wall" in England, there was (approximately) one set of laws. There was one system of measurements. The silver denarius and the gold solidus were accepted all over and bought the same goods everywhere, except that the big cities were naturally somewhat more expensive to live in. One empire, one law, one system of weights and measures, one coinage. If they had progressed to postage stamps, then it would also have been the same. But one language? Don't be silly.

The Egyptians spoke Egyptian and the Greeks spoke Greek. Palestine spoke Hebrew and Aramaic. The Germanic tribes growled their own dialects, and while I don't know what was spoken on the Iberian peninsula, I am certain that it was not Latin. The upper crust of the Empire, in Rome itself, spoke —*Greek!* After all, one couldn't just talk Latin like any gladiator in the arena!

MAYBE it is the example of the Roman Empire that gave us a poor start. But what might have happened if the Roman Empire had continued? Chances are that the number of spoken languages would not have decreased. But all printed matter, all written language, would have been reduced not to one, but to two, Latin and Greek, in the confines of that imaginary continued Roman Empire. There would have been no reason for the Chinese to give up their own language(s) and switch to Latin and Greek, which probably would have seemed insipid and lacking in flavor to them.

India would not have converted either.

The only later empire which could match the Roman Imperium in area was the one inefficiently ruled by the Czar of all the Russias. All the Russians spoke Russian, to be sure, but that does not mean that the Russian Empire did. To begin with, the Ukrainians had their own version of Russian which, in their opinion, was far superior. The Polish section of the Russian Empire spoke Polish. The Caucasus had its own language. And virtually every place else. And in the capital of the empire, St. Petersburg, you did not climb very high if, in addition to impeccable Rus-

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sian (with St. Petersburg pronunciation, substituting a "V" for an "L" whenever possible), you did not speak equally impeccable French and German.

But now times have changed. People travel more. We have rapid communications. And all of the North American continent speaks the same language with the exception of Mexico and the French section of Canada, comparatively small areas compared to the whole.

Correct.

I am the first to acknowledge that this is so. But that is no reason for "extrapolating" an English-speaking Earth. At this moment probably more people speak English than speak Russian, but both together do not even match the number of people who speak Chinese.

And in spite of much and easy travel and rapid communications, the number of languages has actually *increased*. Maybe it would have been easier for the Republic of Eire to continue to speak English. For strong psychological reasons, they elected not to do so. Weird as it may sound, if "simplicity" alone counted, the language of Israel should be German. Many thousands of the immigrants spoke German since birth and many thousands more spoke the closely related Yiddish. But obviously the adoption of German as the official language was an impossibility for Israel, and Hebrew is now back as a living tongue.

At this point somebody is likely to repeat a reasoning that has been offered before. People are evidently reluctant to give up their own language in favor of somebody else's. There should be no such psychological objection to a language which is not somebody else's language, though, but one which has been constructed for the purpose.

J. M. SCHLEYER thought so in 1880 and published a "universal language" called Volapük. It died around 1890. In 1897 L. L. Zamenhof published another one called Esperanto. Twenty years later Louis de Beaufront published an improved version of Esperanto which was called Ido. Of these early attempts — no Esperantist would admit, of course, that Ido was an "improved" Esperanto — only Esperanto had some success. The Esperantists themselves say that it is spoken by 1,500,000 people.

If I suddenly announced at home that I was going to learn Finnish, my wife would probably inform me that good translations of the *Kalevala* into other languages are available. Some of my friends would either keep politely quiet or point out that educated Finns are likely to speak German, English, French or Russian. But if I did

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learn Finnish, I could still talk to three times as many people than if I learned Esperanto. (Besides, most of them can probably speak something else that I can understand.)

To put it plainly and simply (and at the risk of making a few enemies), artificial languages do not work. Some twenty years ago I started reading a journal in Esperanto. I could not finish it; it looked and sounded too silly. Very recently I thought that linguistics, like any other science, must certainly have advanced since 1887 and maybe one of the more recent creations in this field would be better.

I read through the "vocabulary" of Basic English. If I had to express myself in that vocabulary, I'd be a wreck because of frustration. (After that, using Basic English, I could not even say that I was a wreck. That word is missing as unimportant.) Ah, now, maybe I'm just prejudiced. We have, for scientific purposes, the new creation of Interlingua which is advertised as follows: "You can read *Interlingua* if you had no more than one semester of high school French or Spanish or Latin and flunked it." After due consideration I would reword this as reading that you can read Interlingua ONLY if you flunked. If you didn't you get a toothache first.

Let me prove that. In an issue of *Science News Letter* which is lying around on my desk there is one page of Interlingua. It begins with a section on *Physica Atomic*. My eyes already hurt. If you have *Physica* it is darned obvious that the second word must be *Atomica*. But no, adding this esthetically necessary "a" would be "grammar" and that is supposed to frighten people. Another paragraph begins with the words *Le oceanos es vaste reservoirs* . . . and my eye is immediately insulted by having what is decidedly a singular article in front of a word which is just as decidedly a plural.

Yes, English does well without having a plural article (and Latin and Russian manage without any articles), but why pick the one which everybody knows as the French masculine singular article? Why not one which *is* neutral-looking, if the introduction of a plural article is deemed too much?

Then I read *Le Statos Unite ha sex submarinos atomic in servicio e 27 alteres in preparation.*

This is not a language — this is hash! If the six are in *servicio*, why aren't the other 27 in *preparatio?*

I KNOW that the very name "United States" offers certain linguistic problems, because if we want to say that something is of or belongs to the United States, we have to say that it is "American." And there are, geographically

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speaking, many "Americans" who are not of the United States. But I find this problem, misleading as it might be under certain conditions, superior to the Interlingua "solution" of talking about the U.S. Academy of Sciences as the — believe it or not — *statounitese Academia National de Scientia.*

Since artificial languages are likely to be repulsive to the linguist and won't be learned by those who are not, the artificial language is obviously no answer at all. It cannot compete with a real language, which may have some difficulties but makes up for them in tradition and versatility and the fact that it is alive. A marble statue of Miss Universe cannot compete with the living original.

Well, we cannot all agree on somebody else's living language and cannot possibly construct a satisfactory artificial language, so how about a dead language? With nobody actually speaking Latin nowadays, nobody can have feelings of jealousy or envy, not for nationalistic reasons and not for the reason once stated by an Austrian diplomat to his Russian mistress: "You should thank God every morning that you grew up speaking Russian — you don't have to learn it."

The only candidate would be Latin, since Greek, which might otherwise compete, has a different alphabet. And for many centuries Latin came close to being what is called an "international language," one used by many people in many nations. I have often wondered why Latin came into disuse; it *was* such a simple expedient for international science.

The answer, given by an English linguist and philosopher whose name I can't remember right now, is that Latin, even when it was in international use, was just a "male" language.

The man who had just finished writing a long letter in Latin to a colleague in another country would ask his wife in Dutch, French, German or English what they would have for supper or whether the tailor had delivered his new cloak. Likewise he would speak to his children (at least to his daughters) in their "native" tongue. In other words, Latin, while it was in international use, but was no longer spoken by a people, had acquired a certain artificiality. It lacked the flaws of the constructed languages, yet it was not one in which you would argue with your wife about the grocery bill.

Well, what's the answer?

I don't think there is one. English is doing fine as an "international language" nowadays, and is probably doing better than its political competitor, Russian, because the latter has the handicap of an alphabet of its own. But English will not replace any other language.

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It can only be a secondary means of international communication.

Nobody will ever speak "Terran." even when on Mars.

THE EXTINCTION OF THE DINOSAURS

THE question of why the dinosaurs finally became extinct, after having been the ruling group of animal life on Earth for more than a hundred million years, is about as perennial a question as the one about the cause of the Ice Age.

Unfortunately there is no simple answer, at least not an answer of the type which might be written on the back of a postage stamp. It is very much a case like that of the downfall of the Roman Empire — no single cause can be found, but you can easily write 500 pages on the various causes and reasons which for once worked in the same direction, instead of canceling each other out.

For certain types of dinosaurs and other large reptiles of the past — I hope you remember from a former column that not every big reptile which ever lived was a dinosaur—the reasons have been known for quite some time. The marine reptiles, for example, which are collectively called ichthyosaurs, gradually shed their teeth; the customary explanation is that their main food was, or became, soft octopi, and that the ichthyosaurs, in order to obtain their food, needed speed rather than armament. But then other large marine animals came into existence — the mosasaurians, the ancestors of the whales of today, and several gigantic sharks — which were big, hungry, well-toothed and presumably fast enough to take off after the ichthyosaurs.

The extinction of some types of land-dwelling dinosaurs has been blamed on other much smaller saurians who made a diet of the eggs of the bigger ones. Finally there is the rather generally accepted theory of the "heat death."

Reptiles can stand cold weather fairly well, much better than the layman is likely to believe. The worst that cold will normally do to a reptile is immobilize it. But since reptiles have no sweat glands, they overheat easily and literally die of heat stroke. The desert reptiles of today are forever burrowing in the sand or else seeking cracks in the rocks. If there is enough water around, they simply stay in the water, like any contemporary alligator.

Applied to the dinosaurs, this theory of the "heat death" makes the Sun responsible for the extinction of just the largest types. They lived in shallow waters of endless marshes and swamps. They moved around in forests. If something happened that drained the swamps or the forests died of drought, the

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enormous reptiles lacked protection. They could not burrow in sand because of their bulk. They could not find cracks in the rock large enough to protect them. The Sun killed them off.

I AM repeating here what I have written in the past elsewhere because recently two Russian scientists came up with still another theory. It is also a sun which professor Krassovski and Shkevski hold responsible for the extinction of the dinosaurs, but not our sun. They blame a star in the vicinity of our solar system, a star not more than ten or twelve light-years away. That star, they theorize, turned into a supernova sixty million years ago, at the end of the Cretaceous Period. The supernova sent incredible amounts of hard radiation into space, radiation just as nasty as that emanating from a nuclear bomb explosion.

Well, if so, why didn't that radiation kill off the small mammals too? We know they were around at the time. In Canada the skeleton of an early opossum (hardly distinguishable from the current type) has been found associated with the bones of a large saurian.

Krassovski and Shkevski answer that question by saying that the radiation from the supernova probably was not powerful enough after penetrating our atmosphere to kill directly. But it was, they theorize, powerful enough to cause genetic damage. Such damage is cumulative. Now small mammals like that early opossum, and small animals in general, like birds, lizards of assorted sizes and so forth, reproduce within a year, counting from their own birth. They did not have time to accumulate genetic damage.

But the large saurians were doomed by their long life span. It has been accepted among paleontologists since the beginning of the current century that the full life span of one of the large saurians like brontosaurus was probably about a thousand years. Of course we do not know how soon they matured sexually, but for an animal with a thousand-year life span, sexual maturity at fifty sounds somewhat early. Eighty to a hundred years is more probable.

Now, Krassovski and Shkevski say, during this long "pre-marital period" the dinosaurs accumulated so much genetic damage from the radiations coming from space that their rate of "effective propagation" was severely curtailed. The term "effective propagation" means precisely what it implies. The animals presumably mated as frequently as had their ancestors before that star turned into a supernova. The number of eggs they laid was probably the same too. But the number of offspring which was capable of propagating in turn was not.

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I offer this theory as a fascinating idea. I don't know whether it is right or wrong. In fact, I don't know whether we know enough yet about radiation-induced genetic damage to be able to say that things could have worked that way. But it is an idea which should be kept in mind for later reference.

ANY QUESTIONS?

The Other End of the Flashlight Beam.

BOTH in print as well as in private, I have been moaning that I rarely get a question that has not been asked a dozen times before. (About 80 per cent of the letters still deal with the paradoxes of the theory of relativity and I am most thoroughly tired of them.) Well, I did get a new one from a gentleman in Washington whose name I shall not mention because he did not state that I could print it.

At any event, this is the question. Supposing somebody shines a flashlight into the sky in the direction of a star which is several light-years away. The man with the flashlight waits until his light beam gets there; we'll assume that the batteries last long enough and we'll also forget about the fact that the Earth turns. When the beam does get there, the flashlight wielder moves the flashlight and directs it at another star, same distance from the Earth, but several light-years away from the first star.

What happens to the other end of the beam? It cannot possibly travel over several light-years in half a second. My correspondent closed with the remark, "What have I forgotten?"

I told him by mail that he forgot a light beam is not a steel rod. When the "originating end" on Earth is shifted, the "terminating end" does not have to follow. But I think, as I also wrote to my correspondent, that the problem is easier to understand if he does not think of a flashlight but of a machine gun with infinite range. It is quite obvious that the bullets, once they have left the muzzle, will continue to travel in the direction in which they were originally aimed. If, at a later time, you raise or traverse the barrel of the machine gun, the bullets still to be fired will travel in the new direction.

An Overlooked Danger of Space Travel?

READER N. A. Paige of Toronto, Ontario, writes that he hopes this is a new question and then goes on: "I have an idea that one of the extreme dangers the first man in space will face will be that of nausea with vomiting while in a spacesuit and under free-fall

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conditions. It seems likely that, without gravity to help him, an individual would drown in his own juices very rapidly."

Well, this is not a question which can be answered yes or no. It is a rather complicated question, in fact, and I am fortunate that the medical branch of the U. S. Air Force recently published a report which provides some information along these lines.

To begin with, weightlessness (over the short periods that can be produced in airplane flights: about half a minute) has not by itself caused nausea. Secondly, if a man vomits when weightless, the matter is rather forcibly ejected, but of course it would cause trouble if it were caught by the face plate of a space helmet.

Now the answer to this one is that spacemen will not wear suit and helmet (at least not a closed helmet) inside the ship, just as submariners do not wear a diving suit. At the same time, it must be admitted that the first astronauts in orbit probably will wear a pressure suit just in case something goes wrong. I do not know whether this has been decided yet. One might argue that if something does go wrong, it will be so thorough that a spacesuit won't help.

The Air Force studies dealt with the problem of eating and drinking while weightless. As was to be expected, it proved impossible to drink from a glass. The test subjects not only splashed water all over themselves, they also "inhaled" it into the nasal passages and complained that they felt as if they were drowning. One man even managed to get his sinuses drowned. I can't quite figure out how he did that, but if the medical researchers say he did, I simply have to take their word for it.

Drinking through a straw should work, but those who tried it made almost as bad a mess of it as they did with an open container. I can only conclude that this takes a little practice, and thirty seconds of weightlessness is not long enough to acquire practice.

What did work was to squirt the liquid into the mouth from a plastic bottle. These experiments did not teach the most elegant way of drinking while under zero-g, but they did show that it could be done.

The next problem was eating. There weightlessness displayed a lot of nasty tricks. For example, if the man bit into a cracker or a biscuit, the dry fragments, being weightless, managed to float up into the nasal passages, which is one of the most unpleasant sensations a person can have. But eating under zero-g worked fine as long as whatever was eaten was somewhat moist or had a pasty consistency.

In other words, what was eaten had to be of such a nature that it did not crumble but held together.

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But now, as Professor Ehrenhaft used to say, comes the moment where the frog into the water jumps. Several test subjects, immediately after drinking (water only), did vomit. A few people will say that this was due to the fact that they had been given water to drink, but the medical researchers do not agree with this hypothesis. They don't know just what caused it. The men to whom it happened claimed unanimously that they vomited because they leaned against the (rather tight) seat belt.

To go back to the original letter: no case has occurred where weightlessness brought on vomiting all by itself, but after drinking it did occur, presumably because of a constricting seat belt. But it is now known that there is a certain danger factor and further studies are no doubt under way.

The Australian Shoe Size Puzzle.

THE only feature which brought more mail in the history of this column than the one on the shoe size puzzle was the one, way back, on prime numbers. Of course I knew the explanation as I wrote it, but I did not mention it on purpose. I wanted to see how many readers could puzzle it out. A few did, but I got other mail too.

If you remember, the example used dealt with a "Miss S," age 30, shoe size 5. No Miss S of the given age and size wrote in directly to ask whether I had been speaking about her, but two ladies got males to write in and ask this question. I don't recall ever having met either of them, but in one case "Miss S" was Sylvia Cohn and in the other case "Miss S" was Carolyn Sonderberg, both of whom herewith receive mention and the assurance that they are not the "real" Miss S.

One young lady in San Antonio, Texas (wrong age, wrong size and no capital S to her name), startled me by stating that the arithmetic seemed to miscarry in her case. She always came out a year older than she actually is, which incidentally won't matter in her case for many years to come. I went over the figures twice and found that she was right — she did come out one year too old. Fortunately she had given me all the particulars in her letter, and after a while it dawned on me that she had been born in December. Yes, if you are born at the tail end of a year, you'll come out one year too old; you have to assume that your birthday is already past on the day when you do your private arithmetic.

Another aspect that had not occurred to me was pointed out by First Lieutenant David R. Barr of the U. S. Air Force. To quote his letter: "Let z be the shoe size and let x be the largest integer less than or equal to z; then $z = x + y$, where

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y is either zero or ½. After doubling z, Miss S. will obtain $2z = 2x + 2y$ where $2y$ must be either zero or one. If $2z$ is even, then $2y$ is zero, and Miss S leaves it alone; if $2z$ is odd, then $2y$ is one and Miss S subtracts one. In either case, she is looking at the number $2x$ when this step is completed. The addition of 39 and the subsequent multiplication by 5 yields $(2x + 39) \cdot 5 = 10x + 195$. When Miss S tacks a nine onto it, like another digit, she is, in effect, multiplying by ten and adding nine. This will give her $100x + 1959$. The subtraction of the year of her birth will yield $100x$ plus age, *provided Miss S is less than 100 years old.*"

Well, this is the explanation, of course, but I had never thought of the provision which I have put in italics. If Miss S were 130 years old and still wore a size 5, the result would be 630 instead of the 530 to be expected otherwise. The puzzle turns out to be rather polite — it will still insist that the age is 30, but merely increase the shoe size by one.

The Hairs on Your Head.

SINCE the shoe size puzzle found such a response, I yield to the temptation to add one more of the same type. Supposing you live in a town which has 220,000 inhabitants, or any number larger than that. Now you pick your favorite girl (or yourself, if you are a girl) and carefully count the hairs on her (or your) head.

What is the probability that there is another girl in the same town who, at that moment, has the identical number of hairs on her head?

I'll just add one word of explanation, the reason for specifying "girl." It is quite simple; in the case of a man, there could always be an argument of where, near the temples, the "hair" stops and the "beard" begins.

"New" Invention.

NO, this is not in reply to any question. I just feel like adding it.

In one of the German magazines I read an interesting ad about a new type of shower. To invigorate your skin, it says, the shower will intersperse the temperature for which you have adjusted it with "sharp stinging sprays of ice cold water."

Interesting.

But my own shower has been doing that for years, acting on the random hot-water use on the lower floor of my house by my wife, two daughters and, occasionally, the maid. Any time the manufacturer of that new type of shower wants a strongly negative testimonial, he has only to ask for it.

— WILLY LEY

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By ZENNA HENDERSON

SOMETHING BRIGHT

With so much in a time of so little — what could be hidden that they wanted still more?

Illustrated by DILLON

DO you remember the Depression? That black shadow across time? That hurting place in the consciousness of the world? Maybe not. Maybe it's like asking do you remember the Dark Ages. Except what would I know about the price of eggs in the Dark Ages? I knew plenty about prices in the Depression.

If you had a quarter — *first find your quarter* — and five hungry kids, you could supper them on two cans of soup and a loaf of day-old bread, or two quarts of milk and a loaf of day-old bread. It was fill-

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ing and — in an after-thoughty kind of way — nourishing. But if you were one of the hungry five, you eventually began to feel erosion set in, and your teeth ached for substance.

But to go back to eggs. Those were a precious commodity. You savored them slowly or gulped them eagerly — unmistakably as eggs — boiled or fried. That's one reason why I remember Mrs. Klevity. She had eggs for *breakfast!* And *every day!* That's *one* reason why I remember Mrs. Klevity.

I didn't know about the eggs the time she came over to see Mom, who had just got home from a twelve-hour day, cleaning up after other people at thirty cents an hour. Mrs. Klevity lived in the same court as we did. Courtesy called it a court because we were all dependent on the same shower house and two toilets that occupied the shack square in the middle of the court.

All of us except the Big House, of course. It had a bathroom of its own and even a radio blaring *Nobody's Business* and *Should I Reveal* and had ceiling lights that didn't dangle nakedly at the end of a cord. But then it really wasn't a part of the court. Only its back door shared our area, and even that was different. It had *two* back doors in the same frame — a screen one and a wooden one!

Our own two-room place had a distinction, too. It had an upstairs. One room the size of our two. The Man Upstairs lived up there. He was mostly only the sound of footsteps overhead and an occasional cookie for Danna.

ANYWAY, Mrs. Klevity came over before Mom had time to put her shopping bag of work clothes down or even to unpleat the folds of fatigue that dragged her face down ten years or more of time to come. I didn't much like Mrs. Klevity. She made me uncomfortable. She was so solid and slow-moving and so nearly blind that she peered frighteningly wherever she went. She stood in the doorway as though she had been stacked there like bricks and a dress drawn hastily down over the stack and a face sketched on beneath a fuzz of hair. Us kids all gathered around to watch, except Danna who snuffled wearily into my neck. Day nursery or not, it was a long, hard day for a four-year-old.

"I wondered if one of your girls could sleep at my house this week." Her voice was as slow as her steps.

"At your house?" Mom massaged her hand where the shopping-bag handles had crisscrossed it. "Come in. Sit down." We had two chairs and a bench and two apple boxes. The boxes scratched bare legs, but surely they couldn't scratch a stack of bricks.

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"No, thanks." Maybe she couldn't bend! "My husband will be away several days and I don't like to be in the house alone at night."

"Of course," said Mom. "You must feel awfully alone."

The only aloneness *she* knew, what with five kids and two rooms, was the taut secretness of her inward thoughts as she mopped and swept and ironed in other houses. "Sure, one of the girls would be glad to keep you company." There was a darting squirm and LaNell was safely hidden behind the swaying of our clothes in the diagonally curtained corner of the Other room, and Kathy knelt swiftly just beyond the dresser, out of sight.

"Anna is eleven." I had no place to hide, burdened as I was with Danna. "She's old enough. What time do you want her to come over?"

"Oh, bedtime will do." Mrs. Klevity peered out the door at the darkening sky. "Nine o'clock. Only it gets dark before then—" Bricks can look anxious, I guess.

"As soon as she has supper, she can come," said Mom, handling my hours as though they had no value to me. "Of course she has to go to school tomorrow."

"Only when it's dark," said Mrs. Klevity. "Day is all right. How much should I pay you?"

"Pay?" Mom gestured with one hand. "She has to sleep anyway. It doesn't matter to her where, once she's asleep. A favor for a friend."

I wanted to cry out: whose favor for what friend? We hardly passed the time of day with Mrs. Klevity. I couldn't even remember Mr. Klevity except that he was straight and old and wrinkled. Uproot me and make me lie in a strange house, a strange dark, listening to a strange breathing, feeling a strange warmth making itself part of me for all night long, seeping into me . . .

"Mom—" I said.

"I'll give her breakfast," said Mrs. Klevity. "And lunch money for each night she comes."

I resigned myself without a struggle. Lunch money each day — a whole dime! Mom couldn't afford to pass up such a blessing, such a gift from God, who unerringly could be trusted to ease the pinch just before it became intolerable.

"Thank you, God," I whispered as I went to get the can opener to open supper. For a night or two I could stand it.

I FELT all naked and unprotected as I stood in my flimsy crinkle cotton pajamas, one bare foot atop the other, waiting for Mrs. Klevity to turn the bed down.

"We have to check the house first," she said thickly. "We can't go to bed until we check the house."

"Check the house?" I forgot my starchy stiff shyness enough to question. "What for?"

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Mrs. Klevity peered at me in the dim light of the bedroom. They had *three* rooms for only the two of them! Even if there was no door to shut between the bedroom and the kitchen.

"I couldn't sleep," she said, "unless I looked first. I have to."

So we looked. Behind the closet curtain, under the table — Mrs. Klevity even looked in the portable oven that sat near the two-burner stove in the kitchen.

When we came to the bed, I was moved to words again. "But we've been in here with the doors locked ever since I got here. What could possibly—"

"A prowler?" said Mrs. Klevity nervously, after a brief pause for thought. "A criminal?"

Mrs. Klevity pointed her face at me. I doubt if she could see me from that distance. "Doors make no difference," she said. "It might be when you least expect, so you have to expect all the time."

"I'll look," I said humbly. She was older than Mom. She was nearly blind. She was one of God's *Also Unto Me's*.

"No," she said. "I have to. I couldn't be sure, else."

So I waited until she grunted and groaned to her knees, then bent stiffly to lift the limp spread. Her fingers hesitated briefly, then flicked the spread up. Her breath came out flat and finished. Almost disappointed, it seemed to me.

She turned the bed down and I crept across the gray, wrinkled sheets and, turning my back to the room, I huddled one ear on the flat tobacco-smelling pillow and lay tense and uncomfortable in the dark, as her weight shaped and reshaped the bed around me. There was a brief silence before I heard the soundless breathy shape of her words, "How long, O God, how long?"

I wondered through my automatic *Bless Papa and Mama* — and the automatic back-up because Papa had abdicated from my specific prayers — *bless Mama and my brother and sisters* — what it was that Mrs. Klevity was finding too long to bear.

After a restless waking, dozing sort of night that strange sleeping places held for me, I awoke to a thin, chilly morning and the sound of Mrs. Klevity moving around. She had set the table for breakfast, a formality we never had time for at home. I scrambled out of bed and into my clothes with only my skinny, goosefleshed back between Mrs. Klevity and me for modesty. I felt uncomfortable and unfinished because I hadn't brought our comb over with me.

I would have preferred to run home to our usual breakfast of canned milk and shredded wheat, but instead I watched, fascinated, as Mrs. Klevity struggled with lighting the kerosene stove. She

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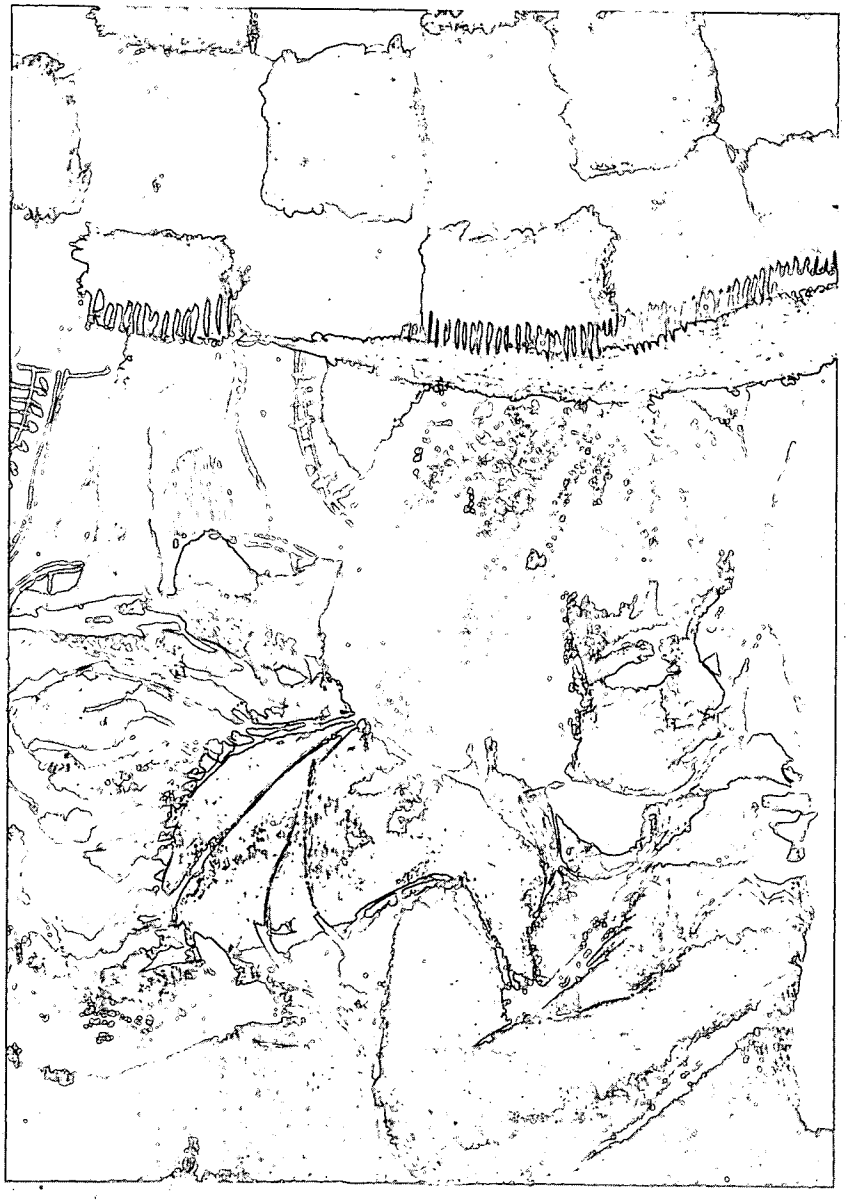

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bent so close, peering at the burners with the match flaring in her hand that I was sure the frousy brush of her hair would catch fire, but finally the burner caught instead and she turned her face toward me.

"One egg or two?" she asked.

"Eggs! Two!" Surprise wrung the exclamation from me. Her hand hesitated over the crumpled brown bag on the table. "No, no!" I corrected her thought hastily. "One. One is plenty." And sat on the edge of a chair watching as she broke an egg into the sizzling frying pan.

"Hard or soft?" she asked.

"Hard," I said casually, feeling very woman-of-the-worldish, dining out — well, practically — and for breakfast, too! I watched Mrs. Klevity spoon the fat over the egg, her hair swinging stiffly forward when she peered. Once it even dabbled briefly in the fat, but she didn't notice and, as it swung back, it made a little shiny curve on her cheek.

"AREN'T you afraid of the fire?" I asked as she turned away from the stove with the frying pan. "What if you caught on fire?"

"I did once." She slid the egg out onto my plate. "See?" She brushed her hair back on the left side and I could see the mottled pucker of a large old scar. "It was before I got used to Here," she said, making Here more than the house, it seemed to me.

"That's awful," I said, hesitating with my fork.

"Go ahead and eat," she said. "Your egg will get cold." She turned back to the stove and I hesitated a minute more. Meals at a table you were supposed to ask a blessing, but . . . I ducked my head quickly and had a mouthful of egg before my soundless amen was finished.

After breakfast I hurried back to our house, my lunch-money dime clutched securely, my stomach not quite sure it liked fried eggs so early in the morning. Mom was ready to leave, her shopping bag in one hand, Danna swinging from the other, singing one of her baby songs. She *liked* the day nursery.

"I won't be back until late tonight," Mom said. "There's a quarter in the corner of the dresser drawer. You get supper for the kids and try to clean up this messy place. We don't have to be pigs just because we live in a place like this."

"Okay, Mom." I struggled with a snarl in my hair, the pulling making my eyes water. "Where you working today?" I spoke over the clatter in the other room where the kids were getting ready for school.

She sighed, weary before the day began. "I have three places today, but the last is Mrs. Paddington." Her face lightened. Mrs. Paddington sometimes paid a little extra or

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gave. Mom discarded clothes or left-over food she didn't want. She was nice.

"You get along all right with Mrs. Klevity?" asked Mom as she checked her shopping bag for her work shoes.

"Yeah," I said. "But she's funny. She looks under the bed before she goes to bed."

Mom smiled. "I've heard of people like that, but it's usually old maids they're talking about."

"But, Mom, nothing coulda got in. She locked the door after I got there."

"People who look under beds don't always think straight," she said. "Besides, maybe she'd *like* to find something under there."

"But she's *got* a husband," I cried after her as she herded Danna across the court.

"There are other things to look for besides husbands," she called back.

"Anna wants a husband! Anna wants a husband!" Deet and LaNell were dancing around me, teasing me sing-song. Kathy smiled slowly behind them.

"Shut up," I said. "You don't even know what you're talking about. Go on to school."

"It's too early," said Deet, digging his bare toes in the dust of the front yard. "Teacher says we get there too early."

"Then stay here and start cleaning house," I said.

They left in a hurry. After they were gone, Deet's feet reminded me I'd better wash my own feet before I went to school. So I got a washpan of water from the tap in the middle of the court and, sitting on the side of the bed, I eased my feet into the icy water. I scrubbed with the hard, gray, abrasive soap we used and wiped quickly on the tattered towel. I threw the water out the door and watched it run like dust-covered snakes across the hard-packed front yard.

I went back to put my shoes on and get my sweater. I looked at the bed. I got down on my stomach and peered under. *Other things to look for.* There was the familiar huddle of cardboard cartons we kept things in and the familiar dust fluffs and one green sock LaNell had lost last week, but nothing else.

I dusted my front off. I tied my lunch-money dime in the corner of a handkerchief and, putting my sweater on, left for school.

I PEERED out into the windy wet semi-twilight. "Do I have to?"

"You said you would," said Mom. "Keep your promises. You should have gone before this. She's probably been waiting for you."

"I wanted to see what you brought from Mrs. Paddington's." LaNell and Kathy were playing in the corner with a lavender hug-me-tight and a hat with green grapes on

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it. Deet was rolling an orange on the floor, softening it preliminary to poking a hole in it to suck the juice out.

"She cleaned a trunk out today," said Mom. "Mostly old things that belonged to her mother, but these two coats are nice and heavy. They'll be good covers tonight. It's going to be cold. Someday when I get time, I'll cut them up and make quilts." She sighed. Time was what she never had enough of. "Better take a newspaper to hold over your head."

"Oh, Mom!" I huddled into my sweater. "It isn't raining now. I'd feel silly!"

"Well, then, scoot!" she said, her hand pressing my shoulder warmly, briefly.

I scooted, skimming quickly the flood of light from our doorway, and splishing through the shallow run-off stream that swept across the court. There was a sudden wild swirl of wind and a vindictive splatter of heavy, cold raindrops that swept me, exhilarated, the rest of the way to Mrs. Klevity's house and under the shallow little roof that was just big enough to cover the back step. I knocked quickly, brushing my disordered hair back from my eyes. The door swung open and I was in the shadowy, warm kitchen, almost in Mrs. Klevity's arms.

"Oh!" I backed up, laughing breathlessly. "The wind blew—"

"I was afraid you weren't coming." She turned away to the stove. "I fixed some hot cocoa."

I sat cuddling the warm cup in my hands, savoring the chocolate sip by sip. She had made it with milk instead of water, and it tasted rich and wonderful. But Mrs. Klevity was sharing my thoughts with the cocoa. In that brief moment when I had been so close to her, I had looked deep into her dim eyes and was feeling a vast astonishment. The dimness was only on top. Underneath — underneath —

I took another sip of cocoa. Her eyes — almost I could have walked into them, it seemed like. Slip past the gray film, run down the shiny bright corridor, into the live young sparkle at the far end.

I looked deep into my cup of cocoa. Were all grownups like that? If you could get behind their eyes, were they different, too? Behind Mom's eyes, was there a corridor leading back to youth and sparkle?

I finished the cocoa drowsily. It was still early, but the rain was drumming on the roof and it was the kind of night you curl up to if you're warm and fed. Sometimes you feel thin and cold on such nights, but I was feeling curl-uppy. So I groped under the bed for the paper bag that had my jammas in it. I couldn't find it.

"I swept today," said Mrs. Klevity, coming back from some far country of her thoughts. "I musta

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pushed it farther under the bed."

I got down on my hands and knees and peered under the bed. "Ooo!" I said. "What's shiny?"

Something snatched me away from the bed and flung me to one side. By the time I had gathered myself up off the floor and was rubbing a banged elbow, Mrs. Klevity's bulk was pressed against the bed, her head under it.

"Hey!" I cried indignantly, and then remembered I wasn't at home. I heard an odd whimpering sob and then Mrs. Klevity backed slowly away, still kneeling on the floor.

"Only the lock on the suitcase," she said. "Here's your jammas." She handed me the bag and ponderously pulled herself upright again.

We went silently to bed after she had limped around and checked the house, even under the bed again. I heard that odd breathy whisper of a prayer and lay awake, trying to add up something shiny and the odd eyes and the whispering sob. Finally I shrugged in the dark and wondered what I'd pick for funny when I grew up. All grownups had some kind of funny.

THE next night Mrs. Klevity couldn't get down on her knees to look under the bed. She'd hurt herself when she plumped down on the floor after yanking me away from the bed.

"You'll have to look for me tonight," she said slowly, nursing her knees. "Look good. Oh, Anna, look good!"

I looked as good as I could, not knowing what I was looking for.

"It should be under the bed," she said, her palms tight on her knees as she rocked back and forth. "But you can't be sure. It might miss completely."

"What might?" I asked, hunkering down by the bed.

She turned her face blindly toward me. "The way out," she said. "The way back again—"

"Back again?" I pressed my cheek to the floor again. "Well, I don't see anything. Only dark and suitcases."

"Nothing bright? Nothing? Nothing—" She tried to lay her face on her knees, but she was too unbendy to manage it, so she put her hands over her face instead. Grownups aren't supposed to cry. She didn't quite, but her hands looked wet when she reached for the clock to wind it.

I lay in the dark, one strand of her hair tickling my hand where it lay on the pillow. Maybe she was crazy. I felt a thrill of terror fan out on my spine. I carefully moved my hand from under the lock of hair. How can you find a way *out* under a *bed?* I'd be glad when Mr. Klevity got home, eggs or no eggs, dime or no dime.

Somewhere in the darkness of the night, I was suddenly swim-

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ming to wakefulness, not knowing what was waking me but feeling that Mrs. Klevity was awake too.

"Anna." Her voice was small and light and silver. "Anna—"

"Hummm?" I murmured, my voice still drowsy.

"Anna, have you ever been away from home?" I turned toward her, trying in the dark to make sure it was Mrs. Klevity. She sounded so different.

"Yes," I said. "Once I visited Aunt Katie at Rocky Butte for a week."

"Anna." I don't know whether she was even hearing my answers; her voice was almost a chant "Anna, have you ever been in prison?"

"No! Of course not!" I recoiled indignantly. "You have to be awfully bad to be in prison."

"Oh, no. Oh, no!" she sighed. "Not jail, Anna. Prison, prison. The weight of the flesh — bound about—"

"Oh," I said, smoothing my hands across my eyes. She was talking to a something deep in me that never got talked to, that hardly even had words. "Like when the wind blows the clouds across the moon and the grass whispers along the road and all the trees pull like balloons at their trunks and one star comes out and says 'Come' and the ground says 'Stay' and part of you tries to go and it hurts—" I could feel the slender roundness of my ribs under my pressing hands. "And it hurts—"

"Oh, Anna, Anna!" The soft, light voice broke. "You feel that way and you *belong* Here. You won't ever—"

The voice stopped and Mrs. Klevity rolled over. Her next words came thickly, as though a gray film were over them as over her eyes. "Are you awake, Anna? Go to sleep, child. Morning isn't yet."

I heard the heavy sigh of her breathing as she slept. And finally I slept too, trying to visualize what Mrs. Klevity would look like if she looked like the silvery voice-in-the-dark.

I SAT savoring my egg the next morning, letting thoughts slip in and out of my mind to the rhythm of my jaws. What a funny dream to have, to talk with a silver-voiced someone. To talk about the way blowing clouds and windy moonlight felt. But it wasn't a dream! I paused with my fork raised. At least not my dream. But how can you tell? If you're part of someone else's dream, can it still be real for you?

"Is something wrong with the egg?" Mrs. Klevity peered at me.

"No — no —" I said, hastily snatching the bite on my fork. "Mrs. Klevity—"

"Yes." Her voice was thick and heavy-footed.

"Why did you ask me about being in prison?"

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"Prison?" Mrs. Klevity blinked blindly. "Did I ask you about prison?"

"Someone did — I thought —" I faltered, shyness shutting down on me again.

"Dreams." Mrs. Klevity stacked her knife and fork on her plate. "Dreams."

I wasn't quite sure I was to be at Klevity's the next evening. Mr. Klevity was supposed to get back sometime during the evening. But Mrs. Klevity welcomed me.

"Don't know when he'll get home," she said. "Maybe not until morning. If he comes early, you can go home to sleep and I'll give you your dime anyway."

"Oh, no," I said, Mom's teachings solidly behind me. "I couldn't take it if I didn't stay."

"A gift," said Mrs. Klevity.

We sat opposite one another until the silence stretched too thin for me to bear.

"In olden times," I said, snatching at the magic that drew stories from Mom, "when you were a little girl—"

"When I was a girl—" Mrs. Klevity rubbed her knees with reflective hands. "The other Where. The other When."

"In olden times," I persisted, "things were different then."

"Yes." I settled down comfortably, recognizing the reminiscent tone of voice. "You do crazy things when you are young." Mrs. Klevity leaned heavily on the table. Things you have no business doing. You volunteer when you're young." I jerked as she lunged across the table and grabbed both my arms. "But I *am* young! Three years isn't an eternity. I *am* young!"

I twisted one arm free and pried at her steely fingers that clamped my other one.

"Oh." She let go. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to hurt you."

She pushed back the tousled brush of her hair.

"Look," she said, her voice was almost silver again. "Under all this — this grossness, I'm still me. I thought I could adjust to anything, but I had no idea that they'd put me in such—" She tugged at her sagging dress. "Not the clothes!" she cried. "Clothes you can take off. But this—" Her fingers dug into her heavy shoulder and I could see the bulge of flesh between them.

"If I knew *anything* about the setup maybe I could locate it. Maybe I could call. Maybe—"

Her shoulders sagged and her eyelids dropped down over her dull eyes.

"It doesn't make any sense to you," she said, her voice heavy and thick again. "To you I'd be old even There. At the time it seemed like a perfect way to have an odd holiday and help out with research, too. But we got caught."

SHE began to count her fingers mumbling to herself. "Three years There, but Here that's —

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eight threes are—" She traced on the table with a blunt forefinger, her eyes close to the old, wornout cloth.

"Mrs. Klevity," My voice scared me in the silence, but I was feeling the same sort of upsurge that catches you sometimes when you're playing-like and it gets so real. "Mrs. Klevity, if you've lost something, maybe I could look for it for you."

"You didn't find it last night," she said.

"Find what?"

She lumbered to her feet. "Let's look again. Everywhere. They'd surely be able to locate the house."

"What are we looking for?" I asked, searching the portable oven.

"You'll know it when we see it," she said.

And we searched the whole house. Oh, such nice things! Blankets, not tattered and worn, and even an extra one they didn't need. And towels with wash rags that matched — and weren't rags. And uncracked dishes that matched! And glasses that weren't jars. And books. And money. Crisp new-looking bills in the little box in the bottom drawer — pushed back under some *extra* pillow cases. And clothes — lots and lots of clothes. All too big for any of us, of course, but my practiced eye had already visualized this, that and the other cut down to dress us all like rich people.

I sighed as we sat wearily looking at one another. Imagine having so much and still looking for something else! It was bedtime and all we had for our pains were dirty hands and tired backs.

I scooted out to the bath house before I undressed. I gingerly washed the dirt off my hands under the cold of the shower and shook them dry on the way back to the house. Well, we had moved everything in the place, but nothing was what Mrs. Klevity looked for.

Back in the bedroom, I groped under the bed for my jammas and again had to lie flat and burrow under the bed for the tattered bag. Our moving around had wedged it back between two cardboard cartons. I squirmed under farther and tried to ease it out after shoving the two cartons a little farther apart. The bag tore, spilling out my jammas, so I grasped them in the bend of my elbow and started to back out.

Then the whole world seemed to explode into brightness that pulsated and dazzled, that splashed brilliance into my astonished eyes until I winced them shut to rest their seeing and saw the dark inversions of the radiance behind my eyelids.

I forced my eyes open again and looked sideways so the edge of my seeing was all I used until I got more accustomed to the glory.

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Between the two cartons was an opening like a window would be, but little, little, into a wonderland of things I could never tell. Colors that had no names. Feelings that made windy moonlight a puddle of dust. I felt tears burn out of my eyes and start down my cheeks, whether from brightness or wonder, I don't know. I blinked them away and looked again.

Someone was in the brightness, several someones. They were leaning out of the squareness, beckoning and calling — silver signals and silver sounds.

"Mrs. Klevity," I thought. "Something bright."

I took another good look at the shining people and the tree things that were like music bordering a road, and grass that was the song my evening grass hummed in the wind — a last, last look, and began to back out.

I scrambled to my feet, clutching my jammas. "Mrs. Klevity." She was still sitting at the table, as solid as a pile of bricks, the sketched face under the wild hair a sad, sad one.

"Yes, child." She hardly heard herself.

"Something bright . . ." I said.

HER heavy head lifted slowly, her blind face turned to me. "What, child?"

I felt my fingers bite into my jammas and the cords in my neck getting tight and my stomach clenching itself. "Something bright!" I thought I screamed. She didn't move. I grabbed her arm and dragged her off-balance in her chair. "Something bright!"

"Anna." She righted herself on the chair. "Don't be mean."

I grabbed the bedspread and yanked it up. The light sprayed out like a sprinkler on a lawn.

Then she screamed. She put both hands up to her heavy face and screamed, "Leolienn! It's here! Hurry, hurry!"

"Mr. Klevity isn't here," I said. "He hasn't got back."

"I can't go without him! Leolienn!"

"Leave a note!" I cried. "If you're there, you can make them come back again and I can show him the right place!" The upsurge had passed make-believe and everything was realer than real.

Then, quicker than I ever thought she could move, she got paper and a pencil. She was scribbling away at the table as I stood there holding the spread. So I dropped to my knees and then to my stomach and crawled under the bed again. I filled my eyes with the brightness and beauty and saw, beyond it, serenity and orderliness and — and uncluttered cleanness. The miniature landscape was like a stage setting for a fairy tale — so small, so small — so lovely.

And then Mrs. Klevity tugged at

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my ankle and I slid out, reluctantly, stretching my sight of the bright square until the falling of the spread broke it. Mrs. Klevity worked her way under the bed, her breath coming pantingly, her big, ungainly body inching along awkwardly.

She crawled and crawled and crawled until she should have come up short against the wall, and I knew she must be funneling down into the brightness, her face, head and shoulders, so small, so lovely, like her silvery voice. But the rest of her, still gross and ugly, like a butterfly trying to skin out of its cocoon.

Finally only her feet were sticking out from under the bed and they thrashed and waved and didn't go anywhere, so I got down on the floor and put my feet against hers and braced myself against the dresser and pushed. And pushed and pushed. Suddenly there was a going, a finishing, and my feet dropped to the floor.

There, almost under the bed, lay Mrs. Klevity's shabby old-lady black shoes, toes pointing away from each other. I picked them up in my hands, wanting, somehow, to cry. Her saggy lisle stockings were still in the shoes.

Slowly I pulled all of the clothes of Mrs. Klevity out from under the bed. They were held together by a thin skin, a sloughed-off leftover of Mrs. Klevity that only showed, gray and lifeless, where her bare hands and face would have been, and her dull gray filmed eyes.

I let it crumple to the floor and sat there, holding one of her old shoes in my hand.

The door rattled and it was gray, old, wrinkled Mr. Klevity.

"Hello, child," he said. "Where's my wife?"

"She's gone," I said, not looking at him. "She left you a note there on the table."

"Gone—?" He left the word stranded in mid-air as he read Mrs. Klevity's note.

THE paper fluttered down. He yanked a dresser drawer open and snatched out spool-looking things, both hands full. Then he practically dived under the bed, his elbows thudding on the floor, to-hurt hard. And there was only a wiggle or two and *his* shoes slumped away from each other.

I pulled his cast-aside from under the bed and crawled under it myself. I saw the tiny picture frame — bright, bright, but so small.

I crept close to it, knowing I couldn't go in. I saw the tiny perfection of the road, the landscape, the people — the laughing people who crowded around the two new rejoicing figures — the two silvery, lovely young creatures who cried out in tiny voices as they danced. The girl-one threw a kiss outward before they all turned away and

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ran up the winding white road together.

The frame began to shrink, faster, faster, until it squeezed to a single bright bead and then blinked out.

All at once the house was empty and cold. The upsurge was gone. Nothing was real any more. All at once the faint ghost of the smell of eggs was frightening. All at once I whimpered, "My lunch money!"

I scrambled to my feet, tumbling Mrs. Klevity's clothes into a disconnected pile. I gathered up my jammas and leaned across the table to get my sweater. I saw my name on a piece of paper. I picked it up and read it.

Everything that is ours in this house now belongs to Anna-across-the-court, the little girl that's been staying with me at night.

Ahvlaree Klevity

I looked from the paper around the room. All for me? All for us? All this richness and wonder of good things? All this and the box in the bottom drawer, too? And a paper that said so, so that nobody could take them away from us.

A fluttering wonder filled my chest and I walked stiffly around the three rooms, visualizing everything without opening a drawer or door. I stood by the stove and looked at the frying pan hanging above it. I opened the cupboard door. The paper bag of eggs was on the shelf. I reached for it, looking back over my shoulder almost guiltily.

The wonder drained out of me with a gulp. I ran back over to the bed and yanked up the spread. I knelt and hammered on the edge of the bed with my clenched fists. Then I leaned my forehead on my tight hands and felt my knuckles bruise me. My hands went limply to my lap, my head drooping.

I got up slowly and took the paper from the table, bundled my jammas under my arm and got the eggs from the cupboard. I turned the lights out and left.

I felt tears wash down from my eyes as I stumbled across the familiar yard in the dark. I don't know why I was crying — unless it was because I was homesick for something bright that I knew I would never have, and because I knew I could never tell Mom what really happened.

Then the pale trail of light from our door caught me and I swept in on an astonished Mom, calling softly, because of the sleeping kids, "Mom! Mom! Guess what!"

YES, I remember Mrs. Klevity because she had eggs for *breakfast! Every day!* That's *one* of the reasons I remember her.

—ZENNA HENDERSON

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CRYING JAG

By CLIFFORD D. SIMAK

Solitary lushes are not the worst kind. The worst are aliens like this—because of what they tank up on — and right in public, too!

Illustrated by WOOD

It was Saturday evening and I was sitting on the stoop, working up a jag. I had my jug beside me, handy, and I was feeling good and fixing to feel better, when this alien and his robot came tramping up the driveway.

I knew right off it was an alien. It looked something like a man,

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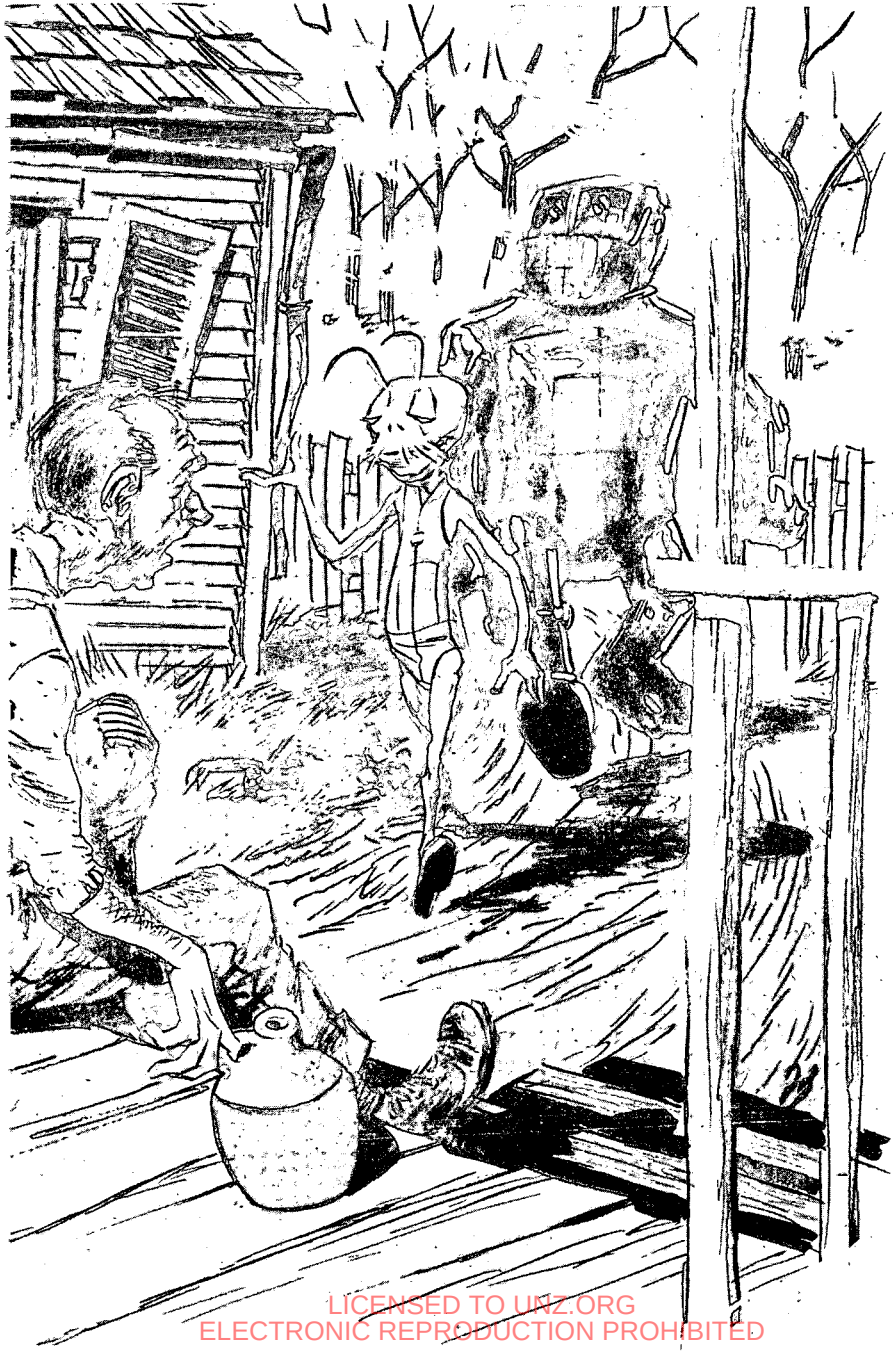

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but there weren't any humans got robots trailing at their heels.

If I had been stone sober, I might have gagged a bit at the idea there was an alien coming up the driveway and done some arguing with myself. But I wasn't sober — not entirely, that is.

So I said good evening and asked him to sit down and he thanked me and sat.

"You, too," I said to the robot, moving over to make room.

"Let him stand," the alien said. "He cannot sit. He is a mere machine."

The robot clanked a gear at him, but that was all it said.

"Have a snort," I said, picking up the jug, but the alien shook his head.

"I wouldn't dare," he said. "My metabolism."

That was one of the double-jointed words I had acquaintance with. From working at Doc Abel's sanitorium, I had picked up some of the medic lingo.

"That's a dirty shame," I said. "You don't mind if I do?"

"Not at all," the alien said.

So I had a long one. I felt the need of it.

I put down the jug and wiped my mouth and asked him if there was something I could get him. It seemed plain inhospitable for me to be sitting there, lapping up that liquor, and him not having any.

"You can tell me about this town," the alien said. "I think you call it Millville."

"That's the name, all right. What you want to know about it?"

"All the sad stories," said the robot, finally speaking up.

"He is correct," the alien said, settling down in an attitude of pleasurable anticipation. "Tell me about the troubles and the tribulations."

"Starting where?" I asked.

"How about yourself?"

"Me? I never have no troubles. I janitor all week at the sanitorium and I get drunk on Saturday. Then I sober up on Sunday so I can janitor another week. Believe me, mister," I told him, "I haven't got no troubles. I am sitting pretty. I have got it made."

"But there must be people . . ."

"Oh, there are. You never saw so much complaining as there is in Millville. There ain't nobody here except myself but has got a load of trouble. And it wouldn't be so bad if they didn't talk about it."

"Tell me," said the alien.

SO I had another snort and then I told him about the Widow Frye, who lives just up the street. I told him how her life had been just one long suffering, with her husband running out on her when their boy was only three years old, and how she took in washing and worked her fingers to the bone to

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support the two of them, and the kid ain't more than thirteen or fourteen when he steals this car and gets sent up for two years to the boys' school over at Glen Lake.

"And that is all of it?" asked the alien.

"Well, in rough outline," I said. "I didn't put in none of the flourishes nor the grimy details, the way the widow would. You should hear her tell it."

"Could you arrange it?"

"Arrange what?"

"To have her tell it to me."

"I wouldn't promise you," I told him honestly. "The window has a low opinion of me. She never speaks to me."

"But I can't understand."

"She is a decent, church-going woman," I explained, "and I am just a crummy bum. And I drink."

"She doesn't like drinking?"

"She thinks it is a sin."

The alien sort of shivered. "I know. I guess all places are pretty much alike."

"You have people like the Widow Frye?"

"Not exactly but the attitude's the same."

"Well," I said, after another snort, "I figure there is nothing else to do but bear up under it."

"Would it be too much bother," asked the alien, "to tell me another one?"

"None at all," I said.

So I told him about Elmer Trotter, who worked his way through law school up at Madison, doing all kinds of odd jobs to earn his way, since he had no folks, and how he finally got through and passed the bar examination, then came back to Millville to set up an office.

I couldn't tell him how it happened or why, although I had always figured that Elmer had got a belly full of poverty and grabbed this chance to earn a lot of money fast. No one should have known better than he did that it was dishonest, being he was a lawyer. But he went ahead and did it and he got caught.

"And what happened then?" asked the alien breathlessly. "Was he punished?"

I told him how Elmer got disbarred and how Eliza Jenkins gave him back his ring and how Elmer went into insurance and just scraped along in a hand-to-mouth existence, eating out his heart to be a lawyer once again, but he never could.

"You got all this down?" the alien asked the robot.

"All down," the robot said.

"What fine nuances!" exclaimed the alien, who seemed to be much pleased. "What stark, overpowering reality!"

I didn't know what he was talking about, so I had another drink instead.

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THEN I went ahead, without being asked, and I told him about Amanda Robinson and her unhappy love affair and how she turned into Millville's most genteel and sorriest old maid. And about Abner Jones and his endless disappointments, but his refusal to give up the idea that he was a great inventor, and how his family went in rags and hungry while he spent all his time inventing.

"Such sadness!" said the alien. "What a lovely planet!"

"You better taper off," the robot warned him. "You know what happens to you."

"Just one more," the alien begged. "I'm all right. Just one more."

"Now, look here," I told him, "I don't mind telling them, if that is what you want. But maybe first you better tell me a bit about yourself. I take it you're an alien."

"Naturally," said the alien.

"And you came here in a spaceship."

"Well, not exactly a spaceship."

"Then, if you're an alien, how come you talk so good?"

"Now, that," the alien said, "is something that still is tender to me."

The robot said scornfully: "They took him good and proper."

"You mean you paid for it."

"Too much," the robot said. "They saw that he was eager, so they hiked the price on him."

"But I'll get even with them," the alien cut in. "If I don't turn a profit on it, my name isn't——." And he said a word that was long and twisted and didn't make no sense.

"That your name?" I asked.

"Yeah, sure. But you can call me Wilbur. And the robot, you may call him Lester."

"Well, boys," I said, "I'm mighty glad to know you. You can call me Sam."

And I had another drink.

We sat there on the stoop and the moon was coming up and the fireflies were flickering in the lilac hedge and the world had an edge on it. I'd never felt so good.

"Just one more," said Wilbur pleadingly.

So I told him about some of the mental cases up at the sanitorium and I picked the bad ones and alongside of me Wilbur started blubbering and the robot said: "Now see what you've done. He's got a crying jag."

But Wilbur wiped his eyes and said it was all right and that if I'd just keep on he'd do the best he could do get a grip himself.

"What is going on here?" I asked in some astonishment. "You sound like you get drunk from hearing these sad stories."

"That's what he does," said Lester, the robot. "Why else do you think he'd sit and listen to your blabber."

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"And you?" I asked of Lester.

"Of course not," Wilbur said. "He has no emotions. He is a mere machine."

I HAD another drink and I thought it over and it was as clear as day. So I told Wilbur my philosophy: "This is Saturday night and that's the time to howl. So let's you and I together—"

"I am with you," Wilbur cried, "as long as you can talk."

Lester clanked a gear in what must have been disgust, but that was all he did.

"Get down every word of it," Wilbur told the robot. "We'll make ourselves a million. We'll need it to get back all overpayment for our indoctrination." He sighed. "Not that it wasn't worth it. What a lovely, melancholy planet."

So I got cranked up and kept myself well lubricated and the night kept getting better every blessed minute.

Along about midnight, I got falling-down drunk and Wilbur maudlin drunk and we gave up by a sort of mutual consent. We got up off the stoop and by bracing one another we got inside the door and I lost Wilbur somewhere, but made it to my bed and that was the last I knew.

When I woke up, I knew it was Sunday morning. The sun was streaming through the window and it was bright and sanctimonious, like Sunday always is around here.

Sundays usually are quiet, and that's one thing wrong with them. But this one wasn't quiet. There was an awful din going on outside. It sounded like someone was throwing rocks and hitting a tin can.

I rolled out of bed and my mouth tasted just as bad as I knew it would be. I rubbed some of the sand out of my eyes and started for the living room and just outside the bedroom door I almost stepped on Wilbur.

He gave me quite a start and then I remembered who he was and I stood there looking at him, not quite believing it. I thought at first that he might be dead, but I saw he wasn't. He was lying flat upon his back and his catfish mouth was open and every time he breathed the feathery whiskers on his lips stood straight out and fluttered.

I stepped over him and went to the door to find out what all the racket was. And there stood Lester, the robot, exactly where we'd left him the night before, and out in the driveway a bunch of kids were pegging rocks at him. Those kids were pretty good. They hit Lester almost every time.

I yelled at them and they scattered down the road. They knew I'd tan their hides.

I was just turning around to go back into the house when a car swung into the drive. Joe Fletcher,

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our constable, jumped out and came striding toward me and I could see that he was in his best fire-eating mood.

JOE stopped in front of the stoop and put both hands on his hips and stared first at Lester and then at me.

"Sam," he asked with a nasty leer, "what is going on here? Some of your pink elephants move into live with you?"

"Joe," I said solemn, passing up the insult, "I'd like you to meet Lester."

Joe had opened up his mouth to yell at me when Wilbur showed up at the door.

"And this is Wilbur," I said. "Wilbur is an alien and Lester is a..."

"Wilbur is a *what!*" roared Joe.

Wilbur stepped out on the stoop and said: "What a sorrowful face. And so noble, too!"

"He means you," I said to Joe.

"If you guys keep this up," Joe bellowed, "I'll run in the bunch of you."

"I meant no harm," said Wilbur. "I apologize if I have bruised your sensitivities."

That was a hot one — Joe's sensitivities!

"I can see at a glance," said Wilbur, "that life's not been easy for you."

"I'll tell the world it ain't," Joe said.

"Nor for me," said Wilbur, sitting down upon the stoop. "It seems that there are days a man can't lay away a dime."

"Mister, you are right," said Joe. "Just like I was telling the missus this morning when she up and told me that the kids needed some new shoes..."

"It does beat hell how a man can't get ahead."

"Listen, you ain't heard nothing yet..."

And so help me Hannah, Joe sat down beside him and before you could count to three started telling his life story.

"Lester," Wilbur said, "be sure you get this down."

I beat it back into the house and had a quick one to settle my stomach before I tackled breakfast.

I didn't feel like eating, but I knew I had to. I got out some eggs and bacon and wondered what I would feed Wilbur. For I suddenly remembered how his metabolism couldn't stand liquor, and if it couldn't take good whisky, there seemed very little chance that it would take eggs and bacon.

AS I was finishing my breakfast, Higman Morris came busting through the back door and straight into the kitchen. Higgy is our mayor, a pillar of the church, a member of the school board and a director of the bank, and he is a big stuffed shirt.

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"Sam," he yelled at me, "this town has taken a lot from you. We have put up with your drinking and your general shiftlessness and your lack of public spirit. But this is too much!"

I wiped some egg off my chin. "What is too much?"

Higgy almost strangled, he was so irritated. "This public exhibition. This three-ring circus! This nuisance! And on a Sunday, too!"

"Oh," I said, "you mean Wilbur and his robot."

"There's a crowd collecting out in front and I've had a dozen calls, and Joe is sitting out there with this — this—"

"Alien," I supplied.

"And they're bawling on one another's shoulders like a pair of three-year-olds and . . . *Alien!*"

"Sure," I said. "What did you think he was?"

Higgy reached out a shaky hand and pulled out a chair and fell weakly into it. "Samuel," he said slowly, "give it to me once again. I don't think I heard you right."

"Wilbur is an alien," I told him, "from some other world. He and his robot came here to listen to sad stories."

"Sad stories?"

"Sure. He likes sad stories. Some people like them happy and others like them dirty. He just likes them sad."

"If he is an alien," said Higgy, talking to himself.

"He's one, sure enough," I said.

"Sam, you're sure of this?"

"I am."

Higgy got excited. "Don't you appreciate what this means to Millville? This little town of ours — the first place on all of Earth that an alien visited!"

I wished he would shut up and get out so I could have an after breakfast drink. Higgy didn't drink especially on Sundays. He'd have been horrified.

"The world will beat a pathway to our door!" he shouted. He got out of the chair and started for the living room. "I must extend my official welcome."

I trailed along behind him, for this was one I didn't want to miss.

JOE had left and Wilbur was sitting alone on the stoop and I could see that he already had on a sort of edge.

Higgy stood in front of him and thrust out his chest and held out his hand and said, in his best official manner: "I am the mayor of Millville and I take great pleasure in extending to you our sincerest welcome."

Wilbur shook hands with him and then he said: "Being the mayor of a city must be something of a burden and a great responsibility. I wonder that you bear up under it."

"Well, there are times . . ." said Higgy.

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"But I can see that you are the kind of man whose main concern is the welfare of his fellow creatures and as such, quite naturally, you become the unfortunate target of outrageous and ungrateful actions."

Higgy sat down ponderously on the stoop. "Sir," he said to Wilbur, "you would not believe all I must put up with."

"Lester," said Wilbur, "see that you get this down."

I went back into the house. I couldn't stomach it.

There was quite a crowd standing out there in the road — Jake Ellis, the junkman, and Don Myers, who ran the Jolly Miller, and a lot of others. And there, shoved into the background and sort of peering out, was the Widow Frye. People were on their way to church and they'd stop and look and then go on again, but others would come and take their place, and the crowd was getting bigger instead of thinning out.

I went out to the kitchen and had my after-breakfast drink and did the dishes and wondered once again what I would feed Wilbur. Although, at the moment, he didn't seem to be too interested in food.

Then I went into the living room and sat down in the rocking chair and kicked off my shoes. I sat there wiggling my toes and thinking about what a screwy thing it was that Wilbur should get drunk on sadness instead of good red liquor.

The day was warm and I was wore out and the rocking must have helped to put me fast asleep, for suddenly I woke up and there was someone in the room. I didn't see who it was right off, but I knew someone was there.

It was the Widow Frye. She was all dressed up for Sunday, and after all those years of passing my house on the opposite side of the street and never looking at it, as if the sight of it or me might contaminate her—after all these years, there she was all dressed up and smiling. And me sitting there with all my whiskers on and my shoes off.

"SAMUEL," said the Widow Frye, "I couldn't help but tell you. I think your Mr. Wilbur is simply wonderful."

"He's an alien," I said. I had just woke up and was considerable befuddled.

"I don't care what he is," said the Widow Frye. "He is such a gentleman and so sympathetic. Not in the least like a lot of people in this horrid town."

I got to my feet and I didn't know exactly what to do. She'd caught me off my guard and at a terrible disadvantage. Of all people in the world, she was the last I would have expected to come into my house.

I almost offered her a drink,

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but caught myself just in time.

"You been talking to him?" I asked lamely.

"Me and everybody else," said the Widow Frye. "And he has a way with him. You tell him your troubles and they seem to go away. There's a lot of people waiting for their turn."

"Well," I told her, "I am glad to hear you say that. How's he standing up under all this?"

The Widow Frye moved closer and dropped her voice to a whisper. "I think he's getting tired. I would say — well, I'd say he was intoxicated if I didn't know better."

I took a quick look at the clock.

"Holy smoke!" I yelled.

It was almost four o'clock. Wilbur had been out there six or seven hours, lapping up all the sadness this village could dish out. By now he should be stiff clear up to his eyebrows.

I busted out the door and he was sitting on the stoop and tears were running down his face and he was listening to Jack Ritter—and Old Jack was the biggest liar in all of seven counties. He was just making up this stuff he was telling Wilbur.

"Sorry, Jack," I said, pulling Wilbur to his feet.

"But I was just telling him . . ."

"Go on home," I hollered, "you and the others. You got him all tired out."

"Mr. Sam," said Lester, "I am glad you came. He wouldn't listen to me."

The Widow Frye held the door open and I got Wilbur in and put him in my bed, where he could sleep it off.

WHEN I came back, the Widow Frye was waiting. "I was just thinking, Samuel," she said. "I am having chicken for supper and there is more than I can eat. I wonder if you'd like to come on over."

I couldn't say nothing for a moment. Then I shook my head.

"Thanks just the same," I said, "but I have to stay and watch over Wilbur. He won't pay attention to the robot."

The Widow Frye was disappointed. "Some other time?"

"Yeah, some other time."

I went out after she was gone and invited Lester in.

"Can you sit down," I asked, "or do you have to stand?"

"I have to stand," said Lester.

So I left him standing there and sat down in the rocker.

"What does Wilbur eat?" I asked. "He must be getting hungry."

The robot opened a door in the middle of his chest and took out a funny-looking bottle. He shook it and I could hear something rattling around inside of it.

"This is his nourishment," said

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Lester. "He takes one every day."

He went to put the bottle back and a big fat roll fell out. He stooped and picked it up.

"Money," he explained.

"You folks have money, too?"

"We got this when we were indoctrinated. Hundred-dollar bills."

"Hundred-dollar bills!"

"Too bulky otherwise," said Lester blandly. He put the money and the bottle back into his chest and slapped shut the door.

I sat there in a fog. Hundred-dollar bills!

"Lester," I suggested, "maybe you hadn't ought to show anyone else that money. They might try to take it from you."

"I know," said Lester. "I keep it next to me." And he slapped his chest. His slap would take the head right off a man.

I sat rocking in the chair and there was so much to think about that my mind went rocking back and forth with the chair. There was Wilbur first of all and the crazy way he got drunk, and the way the Widow Frye had acted, and all those hundred-dollar bills.

Eespecially those hundred-dollar bills.

"This indoctrination business?" I asked. "You said it was bootleg."

"It is, most definitely," said Lester. "Acquired by some misguided individual who sneaked in and taped it to sell to addicts."

"But why sneak in?"

"Off limits," Lester said. "Outside the reservation. Beyond the pale. Is the meaning clear?"

"And this misguided adventurer figured he could sell the information he had taped, the — the—"

"The culture pattern," said Lester. "Your logic trends in the correct direction, but it is not as simple as you make it sound."

"I suppose not," I said. "And this same misguided adventurer picked up the money, too."

"Yes, he did. Quite a lot of it."

I sat there for a while longer, then went in for a look at Wilbur. He was fast asleep, his catfish mouth blowing the whiskers in and out. So I went into the kitchen and got myself some supper.

I had just finished eating when a knock came at the door.

It was old Doc Abel from the sanitorium.

"Good evening, Doc," I said. "I'll rustle up a drink."

"Skip the drink," said Doc. "Just trot out your alien."

He stepped into the living room and stopped short at the sight of Lester.

Lester must have seen that he was astonished for he tried immediately to put him at ease. "I am the so-called alien's robot. Yet despite the fact that I am a mere machine, I am a faithful servant. If you wish to tell your sadness, you may relate

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it to me with perfect confidence. I shall relay it to my master."

Doc sort of rocked back on his heels, but it didn't floor him.

"Just any kind of sadness?" he asked, "or do you hanker for a special kind?"

"The master," Lester said, "prefers the deep-down sadness, although he will not pass up any other kind."

"Wilbur gets drunk on it," I said. "He's in the bedroom now sleeping off a jag."

"Likewise," Lester said, "confidentially, we can sell the stuff. There are people back home with their tongues hanging to their knees for this planet's brand of sadness."

DOC looked at me and his eyebrows were so high that they almost hit his hairline.

"It's on the level, Doc," I assured him. "It isn't any joke. You want to have a look at Wilbur?"

Doc nodded and I led the way into the bedroom and we stood there looking down at Wilbur. Sleeping all stretched out, he was a most unlovely sight.

Doc put his hand up to his forehead and dragged it down across his face, pulling down his chops so he looked like a bloodhound. His big, thick, loose lips made a blubbering sound as he pulled his palm across them.

"I'll be damned!" said Doc.

Then he turned around and walked out of the bedroom and I trailed along behind him. He walked straight to the door and went out. He walked a ways down the driveway, then stopped and waited for me. Then he reached out and grabbed me by the shirt front and pulled it tight around me.

"Sam," he said, "you've been working for me for a long time now and you are getting sort of old Most other men would fire a man as old as you are and get a younger one. I could fire you any time I want to."

"I suppose you could," I said, and it was an awful feeling, for I had never thought of being fired. I did a good job of janitoring up at the sanitorium and I didn't mind the work. And I thought how terrible it would be if a Saturday came and I had no drinking money.

"You been a loyal and faithful worker," said old Doc, still hanging onto my shirt, "and I been a good employer. I always give you a Christmas bottle and another one at Easter."

"Right," I said. "True, every word of it."

"So you wouldn't fool old Doc," said Doc. "Maybe the rest of the people in this stupid town, but not your old friend Doc."

"But, Doc," I protested, "I ain't fooling no one."

Doc let loose of my shirt. "By God, I don't believe you are. It's

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like the way they tell me? He sits and listens to their troubles, and they feel better once they're through?"

"That's what the Widow Frye said. She said she told him her troubles and they seemed to go away."

"That's the honest truth, Sam?"

"The honest truth," I swore.

Doc Abel got excited. He grabbed me by the shirt again.

"Don't you see what we have?" he almost shouted at me.

"We?" I asked.

BUT he paid no attention. "The greatest psychiatrist," said Doc, "this world has ever known. The greatest aid to psychiatry anyone ever has dredged up. You get what I am aiming at?"

"I guess I do," I said, not having the least idea.

"The most urgent need of the human race," said Doc, "is someone or something they can shift their troubles to — someone who by seeming magic can banish their anxieties. Confession is the core of it, of course — a symbolic shifting of one's burden to someone else's shoulders. The principle is operative in the church confessional, in the profession of psychiatry, in those deep, abiding friendships offering a shoulder that one can cry upon."

"Doc, you're right," I said, beginning to catch on.

"The trouble always is that the agent of confession must be human, too. He has certain human limitations of which the confessor is aware. He can give no certain promise that he can assume the trouble and anxiety. But here we have something different. Here we have an alien — a being from the stars—unhampered by human limitations. By very definition, he can take anxieties and smother them in the depths of his own nonhumanity..."

"Doc," I yelled, "if you could only get Wilbur up at the sanitorium!"

Doc rubbed mental hands together. "The very thing that I had been thinking."

I could have kicked myself for my enthusiasm. I did the best I could to gain back the ground I'd lost.

"I don't know, Doc. Wilbur might be hard to handle."

"Well, let's go back in and have a talk with him."

"I don't know," I stalled.

"We got to get him fast. By tomorrow, the word will be out and the place will be overrun with newspapermen and TV trucks and God knows what. The scientific boys will be swarming in, and the government, and we'll lose control."

"I'd better talk to him alone," I said. "He might freeze up solid if you were around. He knows me and he might listen to me."

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Doc hemmed and hawed, but finally he agreed.

"I'll wait in the car," he said. "You call me if you need me."

HE went crunching on down the driveway to where he had the car parked, and I went inside the house.

"Lester," I said to the robot, "I've got to talk to Wilbur. It's important."

"No more sad stories," Lester warned. "He's had enough today."

"No. I got a proposition."

"Proposition?"

"A deal. A business arrangement."

"All right," said Lester. "I will get him up."

It took quite a bit of getting up, but finally we had him fought awake and sitting on the bed.

"Wilbur, listen carefully," I told him. "I have something right down your alley. A place where all the people have big and terrible troubles and an awful sadness. Not just some of them, but every one of them. They are so sad and troubled they can't live with other people..."

Wilbur struggled off the bed, stood swaying on his feet.

"Lead me to 'em, pal," he said.

I pushed him down on the bed again. "It isn't as easy as all that. It's a hard place to get into."

"I thought you said—"

"Look, I have a friend who can arrange it for you. But it might take some money—"

"Pal," said Wilbur, "we got a roll of cash. How much would you need?"

"It's hard to say."

"Lester, hand it over to him so he can make this deal."

"Boss," protested Lester, "I don't know if we should."

"We can trust Sam," said Wilbur. "He is not the grasping sort. He won't spend a cent more than is necessary."

"Not a cent," I promised.

Lester opened the door in his chest and handed me the roll of hundred-dollar bills and I stuffed it in my pocket.

"Now you will wait right here," I told them, "and I'll see this friend of mine. I'll be back soon."

And I was doing some fast arithmetic, wondering how much I could dare gouge out of Doc. It wouldn't hurt to start a little high so I could come down when Doc would roar and howl and scream and say what good friends we were and how he always had given me a bottle at Christmas and at Easter.

I turned to go out into the living room and stopped dead in my tracks.

For standing in the doorway was another Wilbur, although when I looked at him more closely I saw the differences. And before he said a single word or did a single

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thing, I had a sinking feeling that something had gone wrong.

"Good evening, sir," I said. "It's nice of you to drop in."

He never turned a hair. "I see you have guests. It shall desolate me to tear them away from you."

BEHIND me, Lester was making noises as if his gears were stripping, and out of the corner of my eye I saw that Wilbur sat stiff and stricken and whiter than a fish.

"But you can't do that," I said. "They only just showed up."

"You do not comprehend," said the alien in the doorway. "They are breakers of the law. I have come to get them."

"Pal," said Wilbur, speaking to me, "I am truly sorry. I knew all along it would not work out."

"By this time," the other alien said to Wilbur, "you should be convinced of it and give up trying."

And it was plain as paint, once you came to think of it, and I wondered why I hadn't thought of it before. For if Earth was closed to the adventurers who'd gathered the indoctrination data. . . .

"Mister," I said to the alien in the doorway, "there are factors here of which I know you ain't aware. Couldn't you and me talk the whole thing over alone?"

"I should be happy," said the alien, so polite it hurt, "but please understand that I must carry out a duty."

"Why, certainly," I said.

The alien stepped out of the doorway and made a sign behind him and two robots that had been standing in the living room just out of my line of vision came in.

"Now all is secure," said the alien, "and we can depart to talk. I will listen most attentively."

So I went out into the kitchen and he followed me. I sat down at the table and he sat across from me.

"I must apologize," he told me gravely. "This miscreant imposes upon you and your planet."

"Mister," I told him back, "you have got it all wrong. I like this renegade of yours."

"*Like* him?" he asked, horrified. "That is impossible. He is a drunken lout and furthermore than that—"

"And furthermore than that," I said, grabbing the words right from his mouth, "he is doing us an awful lot of good."

The alien looked flabbergasted. "You do not know that which you say! He drags from you your anxieties and feasts upon them most disgustingly, and he puts them down on record so he can't pull them forth again and yet again to your eternal shame, and furthermore than that—"

"It's not that way at all," I shouted. "It does us a lot of good to pull out our anxieties and show them—"

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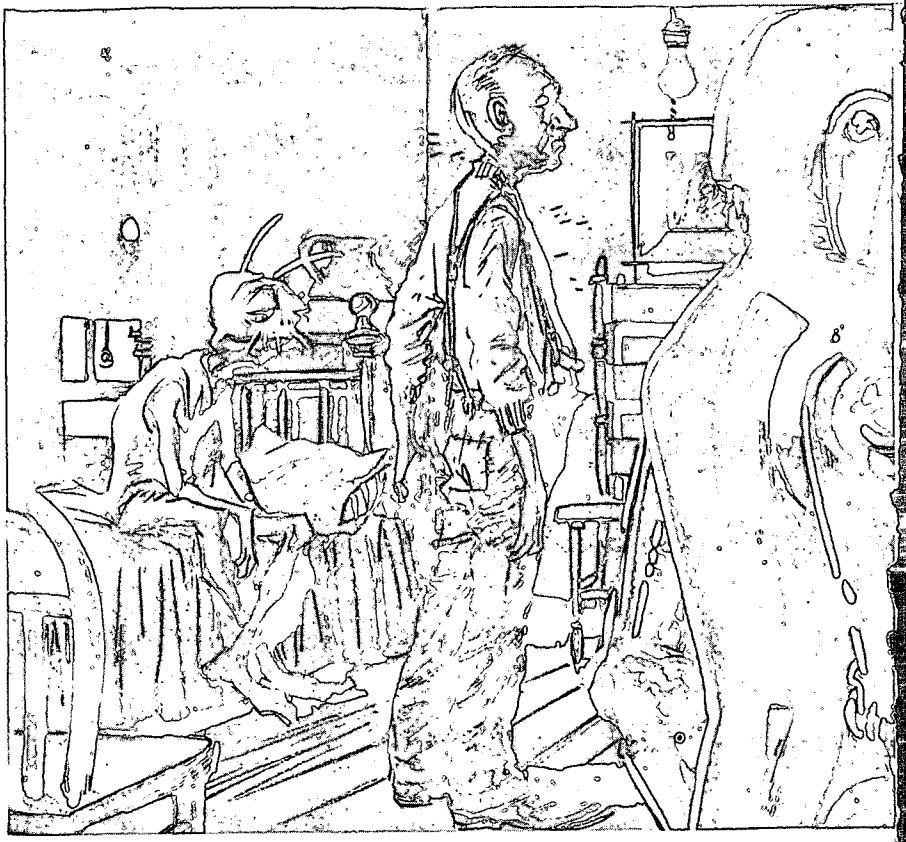

"Disgusting! More than that, indecent!" He stopped. "What was that?"

"Telling our anxieties does us good," I said as solemnly as I could. "It's a matter of confession."

THE alien banged an open palm against his forehead and the feathers on his catfish mouth stood straight out and quivered.

"It could be true," he said in horror. "Given a culture so primitive and so besodden and so shameless . . ."

"Ain't we, though?" I agreed.

"In our world," said the alien, "there are no anxieties — well, not many. We are most perfectly adjusted."

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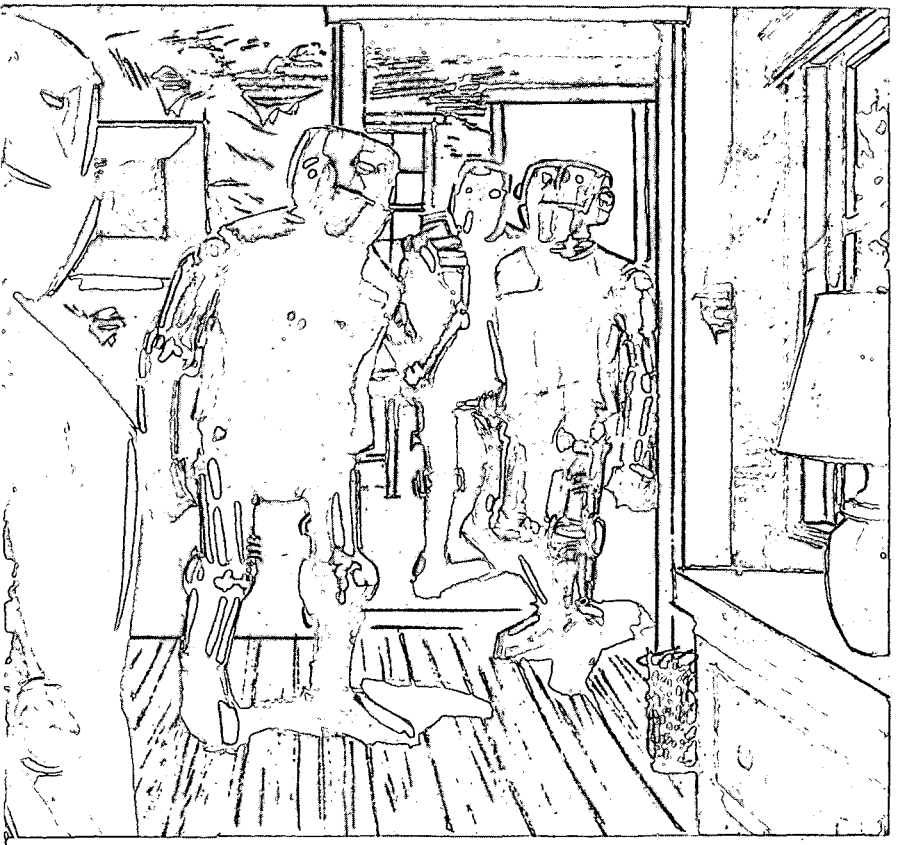

"Except for folks like Wilbur?"

"Wilbur?"

"Your pal in there," I said. "I couldn't say his name, so I call him Wilbur. By the way . . ."

He rubbed his hand across his face, and no matter what he said, it was plain to see that at that moment he was loaded with anxiety. "Call me Jake. Call me anything. Just so we get this mess resolved."

"Nothing easier," I said. "Let's just keep Wilbur here. You don't really want him, do you?"

"*Want* him?" wailed Jake. "He and all the others like him are nothing but a headache. But they are our problem and our responsibility. We can't saddle you."

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"You mean there are more like Wilbur?"

Jake nodded sadly.

"We'll take them all," I said. "We would love to have them. Every one of them."

"You're crazy!"

"Sure we are," I said. "That is why we need them."

"You are certain, without any shadow of your doubt?"

"Absolutely certain."

"Pal," said Jake, "you have made a deal."

I stuck out my hand to shake on it, but I don't think he even saw my hand. He rose out of the chair and you could see a vast relief lighting up his face.

Then he turned and stalked out of the kitchen.

"Hey, wait a minute!" I yelled. For there were details that I felt we should work out. But he didn't seem to hear me.

I jumped out of the chair and raced for the living room, but by the time I got there, there was no sign of Jake. I ran into the bedroom and the two robots were gone, too. Wilbur and Lester were in there all alone.

"I told you," Lester said to Wilbur, "that Mr. Sam would fix it."

"I don't believe it, pal," said Wilbur. "Have they really gone? Have they gone for good? Is there any chance they will be coming back?"

I raised my arm and wiped off my forehead with my sleeve. "They won't bother you again. You are finally shut of them."

"That is excellent," said Wilbur. "And now about this deal."

"Sure," I said. "Give me just a minute. I'll go out and see the man."

I stepped out on the stoop and stood there for a while to get over shaking. Jake and his two robots had come very close to spoiling everything. I needed a drink worse than I had ever needed one, but I didn't dare take the time. I had to get Doc on the dotted line before something else turned up.

I went out to the car.

"It took you long enough," Doc said irritably.

"It took a lot of talking for Wilbur to agree," I said.

"But he did agree?"

"Yeah, he agreed."

"Well, then," said Doc, "what are we waiting for?"

"Ten thousand bucks," I said.

"Ten thousand . . ."

"That's the price for Wilbur. I'm selling you my alien."

"*Your* alien! He is not your alien!"

"Maybe not," I said, "but he's the next best thing. All I have to do is say the word and he won't go with you."

"Two thousand," declared Doc. "That's every cent I'll pay."

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We got down to haggling and we wound up at seven thousand dollars. If I'd been willing to spend all night at it, I would have got eighty-five hundred. But I was all fagged out and I needed a drink much worse than I needed fifteen hundred extra dollars. So we settled on the seven.

We went back into the house and Doc wrote out a check.

"You know you're fired, of course," he said, handing it to me.

"I hadn't thought about it," I told him, and I hadn't. The check for seven thousand in my hand and that roll of hundred-dollar bills bulging out my pocket added up to a lot of drinking money.

I went to the bedroom door and called out Wilbur and Lester and I said to them: "Old Doc here has made up his mind to take you."

And Wilbur said. "I am so happy and so thankful. Was it hard, perhaps, to get him to agree to take us?"

"Not too hard," I said. "He was reasonable."

"Hey," yelled Doc, with murder in his eyes, "what is going on here?"

"Not a thing," I said.

"Well, it sounds to me . . ."

"There's your boy," I said. "Take him if you want him. If it should happen you don't want him, I'll be glad to keep him. There'll be someone else along."

And I held out the check to give it back to him. It was a risky thing to do, but I was in a spot where I had to bluff.

DOC waved the check away, but he was still suspicious that he was being taken, although he wasn't sure exactly how. But he couldn't take the chance of losing out on Wilbur. I could see that he had it all figured out — how he'd become world famous with the only alien psychiatrist in captivity.

Except there was one thing that he didn't know. He had no idea that in just a little while there would be other Wilburs. And I stood there, laughing at him without showing it, while he herded Wilbur and Lester out the door.

Before he left, he turned back to me.

"There is something going on," he said, "and when I find out about it, I am going to come back and take you apart for it."

I never said a word, but just stood there listening to the three of them crunching down the driveway. When I heard the car leave, I went out into the kitchen and took down the bottle.

I had a half a dozen fast ones. Then I sat down in a chair at the kitchen table and practiced some restraint. I had a half a dozen slow ones.

I got to wondering about the other Wilburs that Jake had agreed to send to Earth and I wished I'd been able to pin him

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down a bit. But I had had no chance, for he had jumped up and disappeared just when I was ready to get down to business.

All I could do was hope he'd deliver them to me—either in the front yard or out in the driveway—but he'd never said he would. A fat lot of good it would do me if he just dropped them anywhere.

And I wondered when he would deliver them and how many there might be. It might take a bit of time, for more than likely he would indoctrinate them before they were dropped on Earth, and as to number, I had not the least idea. From the way he talked, there might even be a couple of dozen of them. With that many, a man could make a roll of cash if he handled the situation right.

Although, it seemed to me, I had a right smart amount of money now.

I dug the roll of hundred-dollar bills out of my pocket and made a stab at counting them, but for the life of me I couldn't keep the figures straight.

Here I was drunk and it wasn't even Saturday, but Sunday. I didn't have a job and now I could get drunk any time I wanted.

So I sat there working on the jug and finally passed out.

THERE was an awful racket and I came awake and wondered where I was. In a little while I got it figured out that I'd been sleeping at the kitchen table and I had a terrible crick in my neck and a hangover that was even worse.

I stumbled to my feet and looked at the clock. It was ten minutes after nine.

The racket kept right on.

I made it out to the living room and opened the front door. The Widow Frye almost fell into the room, she had been hammering on the door so hard.

"Samuel," she gasped, "have you heard about it?"

"I ain't heard a thing," I told her, "except you pounding on the door."

"It's on the radio."

"You know darn well I ain't got no radio nor no telephone nor no TV set. I ain't got no time for modern trash like that."

"It's about the aliens," she said. "Like the one you have. The nice, kind, understanding alien people. They are everywhere. Everywhere on Earth. There are a lot of them all over. Thousands of them. Maybe millions . . ."

I pushed past her out the door.

They were sitting on front steps all up and down the street, and they were walking up and down the road, and there were a bunch of them playing, chasing one another, in a vacant lot.

"It's like that everywhere!" cried the Widow Frye. "The radio just

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said so. There are enough of them so that everyone on Earth can have one of their very own. Isn't it wonderful?"

That dirty, doublecrossing Jake, I told myself. Talking like there weren't many of them, pretending that his culture was so civilized and so well adjusted that there were almost no psychopaths.

Although, to be fair about it, he hadn't said how many there might be of them — not in numbers, that is. And even all he had dumped on Earth might be a few in relation to the total population of his particular culture.

And then, suddenly, I thought of something else.

I hauled out my watch and looked at it. It was only a quarter after nine.

"Widow Frye," I said, "excuse me. I got an errand to run."

I legged it down the street as fast as I could.

ONE of the Wilburs detached himself from a group of them and loped along with me.

"Mister," he said, "have you got some troubles to tell me?"

"Naw," I said. "I never have no troubles."

"Not even any worries?"

"No worries, either."

Then it occurred to me that there was a worry — not for me alone, but for the entire world.

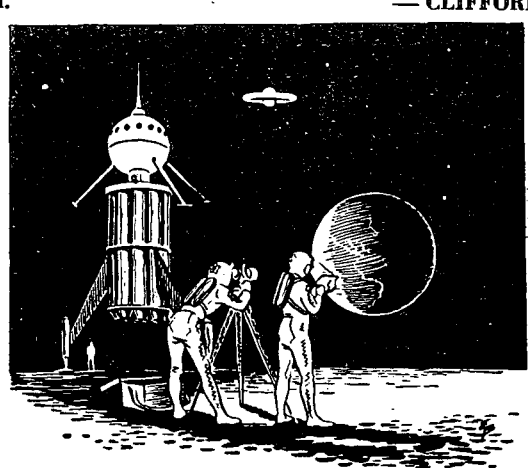
For with all the Wilburs that Jake had dumped on Earth, there would in a little while be no human psychopaths. There wouldn't be a human with a worry or a trouble. God, would it be dull!

But I didn't worry none.

I just loped along as fast as I could go.

I had to get to the bank before Doc had time to stop payment on that check for seven thousand dollars.

— CLIFFORD D. SIMAK



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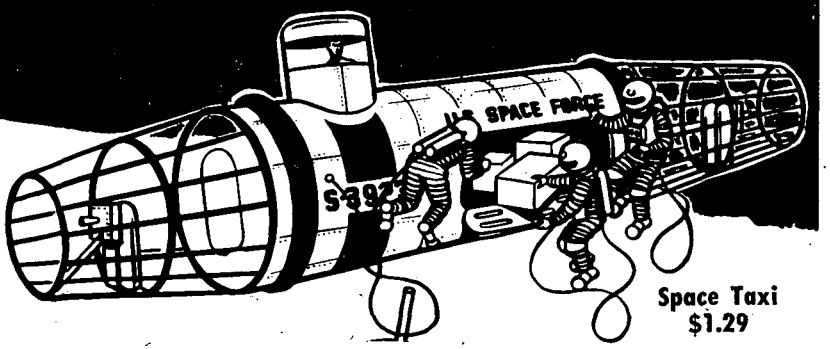

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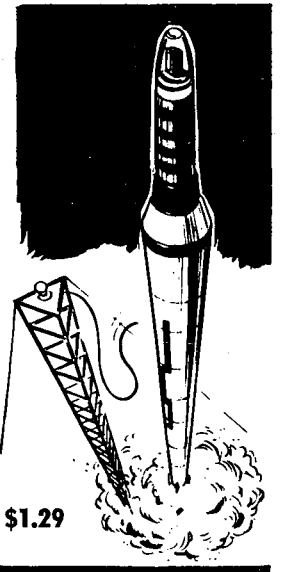

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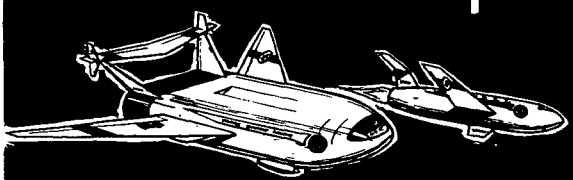

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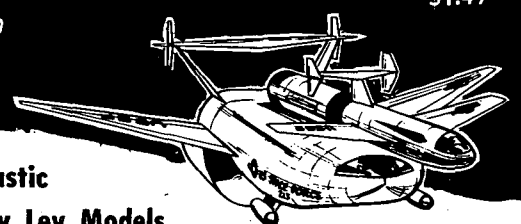

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EAST in the morning

By DAVID E. FISHER

Natural laws are cliches—"what must be must be," for instance —and what must be in this case was, of all people, Dr. Talbot!

Illustrated by DICK FRANCIS

THE first thirty years of Henry Talbot's life were the most promising. He was a bright student through high school, and in college his fellow students often used the word "brilliant" in discussing his mentality; occasionally even his instructors echoed them.

Upon receiving his bachelor's degree, he went to graduate school and eventually received his Ph.D. as an experimental nuclear physicist. He applied for and got a research position at Oak Ridge National Laboratory, in the Electronuclear Research Division.

Dr. Henry Talbot, brilliant

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young scientist, began his career enthusiastically, and ran into a brick wall.

Rather, he crawled up to and against it, for it took several years for him to discover that his life's route lay not on an unobstructed downhill slide. Those years slithered past before he looked up and realized that he had not revolutionized the scientific world; he had discovered no principle of relativity, no quantum theory.

He stopped working for a moment and looked around. All his colleagues were enthusiastic and brilliant young scientists. Where at school, where throughout his life, he had been outstanding, now he was one of the crowd. What had passed for brilliance before was now merely competence.

Henry Talbot felt a vague need which he perceived liquor might fill. That afternoon he left work early for the first time since he had arrived at Oak Ridge. He had to buy the vodka from a bootlegger, Oak Ridge being in a dry county. But, as in most dry counties, that presented no problem. He stopped by Shorty's cab stand, across the street from the police department, and asked Shorty for a bottle. Shorty reached into the glove compartment and, for fifty cents over list price, the vodka changed hands. Henry didn't like to patronize the bootleggers, but he did feel the need for a quick one just this once.

After drinking for several hours in his apartment, Henry Talbot took stock of himself and came to two conclusions:

1. He was satisfied with himself and his life. He had always taken for granted that he would one day be a famous figure in some scientific field, true, but this was actually not so important as, upon casual inspection, it might seem. He liked his work, otherwise he could never have been so wrapped up in it, and he saw no reason for discontinuing it or for becoming despondent over his lack of fame. After all, he reasoned, he had never been famous and yet had been always perfectly content.
2. He liked vodka.

THE next thirty years of Henry Talbot's life, now devoid of promise, were fulfilling and content. He worked steadily and drank as the mood fell upon him, publishing on the average one paper a year. These papers were thorough, the experiments well worked out, without contrived results or varnished sloppiness. The publications were accepted everywhere as solid research papers.

Henry Talbot's name became familiar in the nuclear field. He did not find his face on the cover of *Time*, nor was he ever invited to participate as an "expert" on any television quiz programs, yet he was well known to nuclear re-

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searchers—at least those in his own country. He was honored with a banquet on his fiftieth birthday. *Person to Person* once tentatively proposed to visit him, but the idea was squelched, a visit to a more buxom personality being substituted.

Sex never reared its ugly head. He had not had time for it when young, and so had never fallen into the habit.

At the age of sixty-five he retired. He canceled his subscription to the *Physical Review,* bought a fishing rod, subscribed to the *New Yorker,* and tried Florida. He started at Tallahassee and fished his way down to Ocala. By the time he had reached St. Petersburg, he had decided to try California.

In California he took up golf. He bought a hi-fi set and a dozen progressive jazz records, advertised as unbreakable. They proved not to be, although in fairness to the advertiser it must be said that Henry Talbot had to exert himself.

He decided to try a world cruise. He left the scheduled tour in Japan and visited the Institute for Theoretical Physics in Tokyo, spending some time there just generally chewing the bilingual rag. When he returned to the United States, he renewed his subscription to the *Physical Review,* canceled his subscription to the *New Yorker,* and looked around for another position.

He went to work for the Arnold Research Corporation on a part-time, semi-retired basis. But he had his own lab, his hours were his own, and in a few weeks he was working full time. No one was disturbed by this, he did not apply for more money or recognition, he kept to himself, and he began publishing his one paper each year.

On the tenth year afterward his paper was missing, though not missed. He began to spend less time in his lab and more in the library and behind his desk, scribbling on scraps of paper or staring into space. He was forgotten by the Arnold Research Corporation. He was content with his books and his monthly check.

In his seventy-fourth year, Henry Talbot published a paper in the *Philosophical Magazine* on what he called the "Warped Field Theory." The theory was entirely his own, from beginning to end, and constituted — in his opinion — the first real breakthrough in theoretical physics since Albert Einstein's little idea in 1905. The day the article came out he sat behind his desk all day, puffing on his pipe, not merely content but really happy for the first time in his life.

LIFE continued undisturbed for three more months. Then Larry Arnold, Jr., came into his office, carrying a copy of the *Philosophical Magazine.* Larry Arnold, Jr., was not a scientist but, as he put it,

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he was scientifically minded and was general overseer, public relations man, and coordinator of coordinators of research.

He humphed a few times, groaned as he sat down across the desk from Henry, wheezed twice, smiled once, and said, "Good morning, Dr. Talbot."

"Good morning," Henry replied, folding his hands and trying to look humble yet brilliant.

"I read your article," Arnold said, feebly waving the magazine around before him, "and I don't mind admitting I didn't understand a word of it. Well, I'm not a man to hide his lack of knowledge so I went right out and asked some of the men working here about it. They didn't understand it either. I called up a few people around the country. I — Dr. Talbot, I don't know how exactly to say this to you. I don't know what you intended with this article, but it's got people laughing at us and we can't have that."

Henry kept the same humble look on his face; he fought to keep the same expression. He didn't know what his face might look like if he relaxed for a moment.

"We didn't expect much research from you when we hired you. Well, we know we're not paying you much, and we don't mind if you don't put out much work. Hell, we don't care if you don't put out *any* work. We get our money's worth in good will when people know we've got an old pro like you on our payroll; the young kids can see we won't kick them out when they're all used up. But when you put out papers like this one —" and here he waved the magazine a bit more violently, getting warmed up — "when you do this, and it says Arnold Research Corporation right here under your name, people don't just laugh at you. They laugh at the whole organization. They think that this whole place is going around doing fantastic research like this — this warped field."

He stopped when he saw the look slip a bit from Henry's face, and he saw what was there beneath it. He dropped his eyes and wheezed twice, then heaved his bulk out of the chair.

"I didn't mean to slam into you that way, Dr. Talbot. You know it's an honor to have you associated with the firm. We were even thinking of giving you a testimonial banquet next week on your seventy-fifth birthday . . . It is next week, isn't it? Well, what I mean to say is — I mean we all appreciate the good solid research you've been doing all these years. It's just that — well, you won't fool around like this any more, now will you? And we'll just forget all about it. No hard feelings."

He left quickly, and the door closed behind him.

For the first time in seventy-five

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years, or in the last sixty-nine at least, Henry Talbot cried.

After he cried, he became angry. He wanted to shout, so he left the office early and hurried to his apartment where he could shout without disturbing anyone, which he did. He then took out the vodka, settled Bucephalus, his cat, on his lap and began to pour.

Several hours later Henry Talbot sprawled in the armchair and took stock of himself. He came to two conclusions:

1. At his age, what did he care about fame? He knew his theory was sound, and if the people in his own country didn't appreciate it, what difference did it make? Now, free from rancor, he could understand how they must have received his paper. They all knew old Dr. Talbot — seventy-five and not dead yet. What a ridiculous age for a nuclear physicist! Now he's turning theoretical, they must have chuckled. So they started his paper. And when they came to the first unorthodox assumption, when they reached the first of the many mathematical complexities and indeed paradoxes, they must have closed the magazine and had a good laugh over a cup of coffee.

Had the article been written by some unknown twenty-five-year-old, they would all hail him as a new genius. But coming from old Henry Talbot, the article was ludicrous.

Well, he didn't care. Abroad, he was not so well known. Some countries would not have heard of him at all. They'd read the article seriously, one or two men would understand it. They'd run some experiments to confirm or deny the hypotheses and Henry was confident the experiments would prove him right. He had only to wait. Of course he hadn't much time left, but perhaps they would do it in a year or two, and perhaps he'd still be here to see it and have the last laugh.

2. He still liked vodka.

IT was nineteen years before two Finish physicists, Arkadt and Findrun, ran the necessary experiments. Of the many who had read the article, some knew Talbot and thus laughed it off, some could not understand it, and some understood it and waxed enthusiastic. Eventually the enthusiasm spread to the Finnish Institute for Applied Research where the essential equipment was available. The experiments were an unqualified success.

As soon as the experiments were confirmed, Arkadt sent a telegram to Dr. Henry Talbot, in care of the address which had appeared with his original article, informing him of the happy developments. He and Findrun were still celebrating their spectacular success a week later, this time with Dr. Arrhenial, director of the institute, when Arkadt

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mentioned that he had sent such a telegram and had received as yet no answer.

Arrhenial smiled into his vodka. "Didn't you know? Talbot was seventy-five years old when he wrote that article. I'm afraid you were a little too late for him."

"I didn't know," Arkadt replied.

"A shame," Findrun murmured. "It would have made him so happy."

The telephone rang and Arkadt answered it. His wife was calling, with unusual news. He had just received a letter from America. Imagine that. From a Henry Talbot.

HENRY Talbot saw his face on the cover of *Time* magazine. He refused a request to appear on a television quiz program. (The contestant the network had had in mind to appear with Henry won his money nevertheless, in the category Theoretical Physics, by correctly naming the year in which Einstein first published his Theory of Relativity, the number of papers which comprised the entire theory, the language in which it was first published, the magazine in which it was first published, the year in which the magazine was first printed, the name of the first printer of the magazine, and the year in which he died.) Henry Talbot was termed "The Dean of American Men of Science" by the New York *Times*, which paper triumphantly reported that only thirteen people in the world understood his Warped Field Theory. When asked if there was now anything else for science to do, he replied, "Indubitably." When pressed for more details, he said that his housekeeper always removed his vodka from the refrigerator at three-thirty, and that if he did not immediately return home, it would become unbearably warm.

On the occasion of his ninety-fifth birthday, he was given a gigantic testimonial banquet by the Arnold Research Corporation, "under whose auspices the entire research which culminated in the justly famous Warped Field Theory was conducted."

The next week, when he requested the use of their massive cyclotron to run an experiment, he was told that the machine was in use at the time. A week later, his request was again shunted off. This happened twice more, and Henry went to see Larry Arnold, Jr.

The coordinator was affable, and told Henry that he had checked himself, and that unfortunately the machine was in use and that of course since he, Talbot, was actually at the lab on only a part-time basis, he could not expect to usurp the machine from full-time research workers.

Henry asked what kind of research was being done.

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Larry wheezed twice and told him it was investigating certain aspects of the Warped Field Theory.

"I invented the goddam theory and I can't even get at the machine?" Henry shouted.

"Please, Dr. Talbot. Let's be reasonable. You discovered that theory twenty years ago. I mean, after all. You're an older man now, and that's an expensive piece of machinery—"

Henry slammed the door as he walked out, was not satisfied with the effect, came back and slammed it again, this time shattering the glass. He felt a little better, strode down the hall, and resigned the next day, quietly and undramatically.

He disappeared into retirement. Reports of his death were printed occasionally. They were never denied. They stopped after several years, were taken to be final, and his name was not often mentioned by the newspapers.

One hundred and three years after his birth, the Nobel Prize was awarded to Henry Talbot for his Warped Field Theory. The committee decided not to look into the matter of discovering Dr. Talbot's heirs until after the ceremony, expecting that someone would turn up to claim the award in his name.

Henry Talbot accepted the medallion and check himself from the hand of the King of Sweden, making his acceptance speech in hurriedly learned but understandable Swedish. The newspapers of the world devoured him and made big news of the fact that he had been practically fired nine years before. He was deluged with offers of employment, most of which sought him as a public-relations man. He accepted the offer of the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey. His duties here were non-existent. He would be paid, cared for. He was to think, as much or as little as he pleased. The Institute was apologetic that they had not been aware of his unemployment previously. He was invited to stay with them for as long as he liked. Henry Talbot settled back finally, in comfort.

The research upon which he now embarked was so deep, so complex that he did not intend to come to any publishable conclusions in his lifetime. He desired no experimentation now; he wanted only to think, to think in purely mathematical terms of the universe as an entity. He withdrew into the sanctity of his study, thankful to Princeton for the peace and tranquility it offered.

Several years later a notice of his death was published in the New York *Times*. Henry did not read the New York *Times*, but the treasurer at the Institute evidently did. His checks stopped coming. Henry did not complain. He had saved a lot of money and his tastes were

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simple. He did not have to pay a bootlegger's price in Princeton.

In his hundred and eighty-first year, Henry first became seriously aware of the possibility that he might not die.

ONE night during his two hundred and forty-fifth year — it began to seem to him purposeless, but he still kept accurate count — Henry pushed back from his desk and sighed.

Outside the window, in the gently falling snow, the campus of Princeton looked exactly as it had when he had first come, but things were different. No one now at the Institute knew him; he had known no one there for seventy-five years now. Probably at no other place in the country than at the Institute for Advanced Study could he have kept his study for so long, could he have been left so alone. And it was good, but now he was lonely. Lonely, bored by his solitude, aware of his boredom and utter lack of friends.

He had realized long ago the compensation demanded for eternity. When he had first begun to think of the possibility that he might not die, he had realized that it would mean leaving his friends, his family, and continuing alone. When he had first begun to speculate on his seeming immortality, how it had come about and why, he had known he would be lonely.

This is the way to the Übermensch,
This is the way to the Übermensch,
This is the way to the Übermensch,
Not in a crowd, but alone.

Nearly every great mind within the past hundred years had pointed out the difficulty of man's accomplishing anything in his brief hundred years of life, had pointed out the necessity of immortality to a great mind. And what is necessary will be. But this is the way of evolution: not in a crowd, but alone. One man in a million, then another, then another.

It was statistically improbable that he was the first. So there must be others. But so far, in two hundred and forty-five years, he had not met any that he knew of. Then again, there was no way of knowing. Anyone passing him on the street would not know, and he meeting another would not know.

A purring broke through into his reverie and, looking down, he became aware of Bucephalus, his cat, rubbing against his legs. He laughed, bent down and picked her up. Here was the exception, of course. Old Bucephalus. He laughed again, shaking his head in wonder. He had had Bucephalus for the past hundred and fifty years.

"Now what justification does a cat have for living forever?" he wondered aloud, holding her at arm's length and smiling at her. She lifted one paw and dabbed at his face. He put her down and went to

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get her milk. "And how did we ever find each other?" Perhaps there was some subliminal way of knowing. Perhaps, without knowing, the immortals knew.

While Bucephalus lapped at her milk, Henry Talbot walked out for a breath of air. He wandered off the campus, finally pausing in front of a candy-and-soda store. He felt a vague curiosity and went in to look at the newspapers. After reading through one, he stood back and sighed. The same old thing, always the same old thing. The new wave of immigrants — he looked again to see where they were from this time; he didn't recognize the name of the place, but it didn't matter—the new wave of immigrants was a disgrace to New York, was destroying real estate values, was a burden to society, to the *last* wave of immigrants who had by now made their place. The President said we would fight, if necessary, one last war to make the world safe for democracy. Statistics showed that juvenile delinquency was on the increase; it was traced to a lack of parental authority in the home.

Always the same old thing.

Only his work was new, always changing. But now, after nearly a hundred and fifty years of thought, he felt he was in over his head. It was getting too abstract. He needed some good solid experimental research, he felt. Something concrete, down-to-earth. He wanted to play with a hundred-channel analyzer, measure some cross sections, determine a beta-decay scheme. But he couldn't ask them here for a lab. He didn't dare tell them who he was. Too much commotion, notoriety. The newspapers again. Good God, no.

He turned to go back to his study, and then stopped dead. He couldn't go back there. His brain was spinning without a clamp; he needed to fasten to something and orient himself in this vast universe. His fingers itched to get at some experiment. He couldn't go back to his study.

He decided to take a vacation. He had never gotten as far as Miami Beach, he remembered. The sun would feel good, and he could do with a bit of a tan.

He flew down that night.

After he had checked in at the Sea Lion, and as he was following the bellboy across the high and wide lobby to the elevator, a woman crossed his path. In her late twenties, perhaps early thirties, she was simply stunning. Dark hair, light skin, blue eyes almost purple with a Eurasian slant to them, long firm legs and slim ankles. For the first time in many a year, Henry stopped to look at a woman.

The bellboy realized that he had walked on alone and returned to Talbot.

"That woman is beautiful." Henry gestured toward her back.

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The bellboy smirked. Henry followed him to his room.

HENRY lay in the sun for two weeks and grew younger day by day. His skin tanned, his muscles became hard with the exertion of lengthy swims, the creases in his face smoothed out. Still he felt vaguely dissatisfied, empty. He lay on the beach, gazing into the ocean, and knew that something was missing.

The woman he had seen that first night crossed between him and the ocean and continued down the beach. Henry watched her out of sight.

"That woman is beautiful," he thought.

Sex, he thought. I wonder if that's what's missing. There was another aspect to be considered, of course. Two hundred and forty-five. And then a blonde young lady in a bikini wavered by him and he knew in that moment that he could.

He stood up and walked after her.

"I wonder if I might walk a bit with you," he said.

She looked him over carefully and then shrugged her shoulder, not quite dislodging the upper portion of her suit. "Suitcha self."

After a while she asked, "What business ya in?"

"I'm sort of retired," he explained, finding her very charming and refreshing to talk to. "I had a modest income a while ago. I invested wisely, or prudently at least, and the interest has built up into quite a fortune by now."

"Really," she said.

They walked down the beach, hand in hand.

FIVE nights later he got out of bed when she fell asleep. He dressed and walked despondently down to the lobby. This was not it, not it at all. God, but her conversation was absolutely impossible. He couldn't stay with her another minute.

His problem was still unsolved. He wanted to get back to work, he wanted company, he wanted *life* again. As he came into the lobby, the woman of the first night passed by him again. She looked at him as she came, and smiled as she passed.

That, he thought, is a lovely woman. He stared at her back. How old would you say she is? Late twenties, not a day over thirty. Yet with a serenity in the eyes, in the smile somehow, that gives the impression of lifetimes of living. Yet not a day over thirty, surely no older than that.

That, he thought, is what I need. A woman like that to sleep with and, yes, to be with, even to talk with. She would not be like the one upstairs. But, he thought, one does not buy a woman like that. One marries her. Somehow, without knowing, he knew that.

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And why not?

Why not, indeed?

He returned to his own room, stripped and consulted the mirror. Dye his hair, that was really all he needed. He smiled into the mirror. Forty, he thought, even thirty-five. Certainly, with this tan and slim body and his hair dyed, thirty-five at the most.

He went to bed, happily making plans. A new life opened up for him.

He would take a new name; he would live again. There was nothing to stop him.

That night, in the Sea Lion Hotel in Miami Beach, Henry Talbot died.

TWO months later Arnold Bottal, an experimental nuclear physicist of perhaps thirty-five, and his charming wife — with exquisite, nearly purple Eurasian eyes — joined the new country club in Lincoln Hills, New York, where Bottal had newly joined the Applied Physics Division of the Carbide Nuclear Company.

This Arnold Bottal was not a brilliant physicist, but he was certainly competent in his job. The company was satisfied with him. He and his wife bought a bubble home in the suburbs of Lincoln Hills and, together with their cat Bucephalus, lived happily ever after.

— DAVID E. FISHER

STATEMENT REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, AND JULY 2, 1946 (Title 39, United States Code Section 233) SHOWING THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION OF

February, 1960,

GALAXY MAGAZINE, published Bi-Monthly at New York, N. Y., for October 1, 1959.

1. The names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor and business managers are: *Publisher* Robert M. Guinn, 421 Hudson St., New York 14, N. Y.; *Editor* H. L. Gold, 421 Hudson St., New York 14, N. Y.; *Managing editor* None; *Business manager* None.

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ROBERT M. GUINN, *Publisher*

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 30th day of September, 1959.

Joan J. DeMario, Notary Public, State of New York, No. 24-5978800. Qualified in Kings County.

JOAN J. DeMARIO

(My commission expires March 30, 1960)

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GALAXY'S 5 Star Shelf

OSSIAN'S RIDE by Fred Hoyle. Harper & Bros., N.Y., $3.00

IN ACCOLADING last year's *The Black Cloud* by the famous cosmologist, I hoped that he would occasionally go on forsaking his telescope for the typewriter. He did. And his new book is an even happier event in some ways than its startling predecessor. Hoyle's story writing skill, technique and dialogue have improved tremendously since his first effort, which was notable mainly for its humor and rich imagination.

Here he has turned out a science-mystery-spy story that has no apparent forebear in the SF repertory. In fact, John Buchan and E. P. Oppenheim are the spiritual godfathers of this action-crammed thriller.

The basic idea is novel—a brand-new industrial complex, only ten years old, secreted in a remote and intensely guarded corner of Ireland, already overshadowing the giant industrial nations and dedicated to maintaining its mystery. The secret is finally uncovered by a resourceful young Cambridge student, one of the most unorthodox spies in SF history, after some

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chase scenes worthy of *The Thirty-nine Steps.*

Rating: ★★★★★

THE WORLD THAT COULDN'T BE & EIGHT OTHER NOVELETS FROM GALAXY, THE FOURTH GALAXY READER, edited by H. L. Gold. Doubleday & Co., Inc., N.Y., $3.95

TWO ANTHOLOGIES of stories that first appeared in this magazine, and that therefore are not for us to remark on.

ENCOUNTER by J. Hunter Holly. Avalon Books, N.Y., $2.75

HOLLY, the newest addition to the Avalon stable of rapid-reading, action-packed authors, is even rapider and more fully packed than the average. His yarn of an alien castaway marooned on Earth is spattered with the blood of some twenty murders.

Appears as if the alien has power to absorb knowledge directly from other brains, but only at the cost of gruesomely exploded craniums. He can sense emotion, although not a true telepath, and can control all animal life except felines. A being like that could rule the world if he wants to and he wants to.

However, we're a pretty tough species when our and our cats' backs are up, as our alien learns.

Rating: ★★★½

PURPLE PIRATE by Talbot Mundy. Gnome Press, Hicksville, N.Y., $4.50

SINCE SEQUELS almost invariably are diminished returns, and with *Tros of Samothrace* the predecessor, any successor would seem foredoomed to mediocrity. However, *Purple Pirate,* rescued by Gnome from a quarter-century of oblivion, is fully its equal in plot audacity, skill of execution and characterization.

Tros's story reopens in Egypt shortly after the death of his erstwhile bitter enemy, Caesar. He is kept busy rescuing Cleopatra's chestnuts while she maliciously holds his Norse crew hostage, forestalling his dream of circumnavigating the globe.

Tros has all of Conan's attributes plus one: though a superman, he is only human. Conan never has inner thoughts or fears; Tros is plagued by them. Additionally, each chapter head holds pearls of wisdom from his introspection, as did the former book, that constitute a culture's code of ethics in themselves.

Rating: ★★★★★

GIANTS FROM ETERNITY by Manly Wade Wellman. Avalon Books, N.Y., $2.75

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QUAINTNESS IS the keynote of this yarn, brought back from the dust of decades, like its titled Giants.

Earth is threatened by the unleashed growth of an alien life-form that absorbs and transmutes all substances into its own matter type. However, a gaseous essence of the substance has the power to revivify the dead. To solve the problem of man's survival, Oliver Norfleet recalls Tom Edison, Lou Pasteur, Charlie Darwin, Ike Newton and Cutie Curie.

The naiveté of the fairytale plot is refreshing, if viewed as a device for getting five delightful oldtimers back into circulation — and if fairytale logic and dismissal of inconvenient facts don't irritate you.

Rating: ★★★

LORD OF THE FLIES by Wm. Golding. Capricorn Books, N.Y., $1.25

ONE OF civilization-harassed mankind's oldest dreams is the tropic isle, plentifully stocked with accessible goodies and free from human and animal predators. Golding unloads his band of sub-teeners on such an island paradise, victims of an unnamed and undescribed war.

For the first time free of adult supervision, the instinct of the British youngsters is to revel. However, for rescue, a signal fire must be tended, argues twelve-year-old Ralph who gets elected leader of a democracy. From that point on, Golding paints a truly terrifying picture of the decay of a miniscule society.

Well on its way to becoming a modern classic, this '55 hard-cover is welcome in its Putnam-Capricorn reissue.

Rating: ★★★★★

THE STARS ARE TOO HIGH by Agnew H. Bahnson, Jr. Random House, Inc., N.Y., $3.95

THE REVERSE of Divide and Conquer must be Frighten and Unite. History holds many examples and SF several notable ones, most of them meant to avert global war with phony extraterrestrial threat.

Bahnson's UFO does nearly every maneuver accredited to bona fide saucers, only it was secretly built in Nevada by private citizens. In early SF, this was standard, but half a thought will show what a tiger's tail such a situation is.

To solve their dilemma, the three builders enlist the aid of the scientific adviser to the Air Force Chief of Staff, to help determine disposal of the super-machine to the best interests of all humanity. Enter idealism: all humanity will be united by means of impressive displays of power over Moscow and Washington by supposed ETs.

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Bahnson, though, hews close to reality and some best-laid plans go mighty agley. He proposes a solution that unfortunately relies on the foresight, a sadly lacking ingredient, of present world leaders.

Rating: ★★★

THE INVOLUNTARY IMMORTALS by Rog Phillips. Avalon Books, N.Y., $2.75

DESPITE PHILLIPS'S story, immortality isn't dead yet, not when tackled by craftsmen like Heinlein or Simak.

Phillips picks up his protagonists a few years hence, in the second century of their existence. A shared but unknown experience back in 1848 produced several hundred immortals. They have since scouted for stragglers and experimented for the source of their longevity.

Unlike the aforementioned masters, Phillips doesn't permit his people the wisdom of their years. They act as well as look like perennial teenagers.

Rating: ★★

SF: '59, edited by Judith Merril. Gnome Press, Hicksville, N.Y., $3.50

MISS MERRIL'S present anthology, for the first time in this series, is more an anthology than the *Ladies Home Journal of SF.* Most of the stories are good; several, including "Triggerman" by J. F. Bone, "Prize of Peril" by Sheckley, and "Or All the Seas with Oysters" by Davidson, are excellent.

The Science Fact section is back, however, despite Miss Merril's admission that virtually every type of publication is giving enormously serious coverage to even the most outlandish scientific investigations.

Rating: ★★★★ (stories only)

THE SCIENCE FICTION NOVEL. Advent: Publishers, P.O. Box 9228 Chicago 90, Ill., $3.50

ROBERT A. HEINLEIN, C. M. Kornbluth, Robert Bloch and Alfred Bester each delivered a lecture on the worth of science fiction early in 1957 at the U. of Chicago. Basil Davenport has added a genuinely catalytic introduction to these, so that the contradictorinesses and mutual exclusions combine in a way that the authors never meant them to, for each, of course, has his own set of ingredients, his own measures, his own way of mixing. Davenport likes them all, and so do we.

THINGS THAT GO BUMP IN THE NIGHT by Louis C. Jones. Hill & Wang, N.Y., $3.75

DURING A six-year period at the N.Y. State College for Teachers, Dr. Jones collected a huge quantity of lore, legend and phenomena.

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Though documented, his book is pegged for entertainment value; Dr. Jones admits to blending stories for enhancement.

His haunts range from early colonial to post-WW II, from screamers to bumpers, from do-gooders to no-goodniks.

THE ATOM AND THE ENERGY REVOLUTION by Norman Lansdell. Philosophical Library, N.Y., $6.00

IN OUR civilization, individuals consume more power than entire townships did not too many years ago. Demands upon our power resources are therefore prodigious — and extrapolation indicates an utterly fantastic increase in the close future. Moreover, fossil fuels, aside from increasing scarcity, must be reserved for chemical use. Other energy sources must be found.

Lansdell's study, though primarily concerned with nuclear energy, includes the latest actual and conjectural data on many other sources.

PAPERBACK NEWS

SIGNET BOOKS: *The Door into Summer,* Robert A. Heinlein, 35¢. Heinlein's superlative time travel yarn of revenge and paradox . . . *The Black Cloud,* Fred Hoyle, 35¢. Astronomer Hoyle's nova-like entry into the SF firmament . . . *The Man Who Sold the Moon,* Robert A. Heinlein, 35¢. Four of the six stories in the original collection; "Blowups Happen" and "Lifeline" are omitted.

ACE BOOKS: *The Macabre Reader,* edited by Donald A. Wollheim, 35¢. Several grisly masterpieces as well as some ghosts of real stories . . . *Plague Ship* and *Voodoo Planet,* Andrew North, 35¢. "Ship" is Andrew North-Andre Norton's '56 Gnome juvenile. "Planet" is a new novelet . . . *Red Alert,* Peter Bryant, 35¢. That one man can kill the world with a button is the story skeleton of a well-muscled yarn. . . . *The Invaders Are Coming,* Alan E. Nourse and J. A. Meyer, 35¢. Bureaucratic America is a setup for a Batista-type strong man with a program . . . *The Hidden Planet,* edited by D. A. Wollheim, 35¢. Stanley Weinbaum's "The Lotus Eaters" gleams like new despite a quarter-century . . . *Recruit for Andromeda,* Milton Lesser; *The Plot Against Earth,* Calvin M. Knox; Ace Double, 35¢. Lesser's yarn hurtles to a pratfall. Knox's less pretentious effort holds surprises.

BALLANTINE BOOKS: *The Midwich Cuckoos,* John Wyndham, 35¢. An expert chiller about a pregnant situation — invasion by insemination . . . *Star Science Fiction 5,* edited by Frederik Pohl, 35¢. A good collection of new stories.

—FLOYD C. GALE

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DEATH'S WISHER

BY JIM WANNAMAKER

Illustrated by DICK FRANCIS

FLINN took the seat that Wilmer indicated, dropped his overnight bag beside it, and tried to relax. He'd had five hours of inactivity on the plane, but the peremptory manner with which he had been routed out of his California apartment and conveyed to Washington, D. C., had so filled his mind with unanswered questions that he still found rest to be impossible. He had been told simply that the government needed him; and when federal wheels started turning, there wasn't much a private citizen could do to stop them.

He watched the tall, lean, dark-haired man, who had been introduced as Dr. Jackson Wilmer, nuclear physicist, disappear through a door.

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There's just one way

to disarm a bomb — be at least

a step ahead of it —

but what if it's always

at least a step

ahead of you?

Flinn looked around.

The room in which he sat — comparatively small, one of hundreds in the vastness of the Pentagon—seemed to be a sort of minor office. At least there were several desks and filing cabinets. Besides himself, there were now only two other men in the room.

One, a complete stranger, sat at a desk across the room with his back turned toward Flinn.

The other leaned against the wall near the door. All Flinn knew about him, despite the fact that they had been as close as boy and dog for the past seven hours, was that his name was Hayes and that he was a special agent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. There was a muscular hardness about this young man that be-

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trayed an athletic background. He was about thirty, had a craggy face beneath short brown hair, hard gray eyes, and his nose had been broken at least once. There was a light trace of beard beginning to show on the agent's face, but his brown summer suit still looked neat, and the man himself seemed something less than tried.

Looking at him, Flinn felt a sense of his own shabbiness. He needed a shave as badly as his slacks and sports jacket needed pressing.

At forty-two, Flinn was somewhat taller than average and slightly underweight from overwork and the irregularities of a bachelor existence. His black hair, beginning to recede a little, was peppered with silver, and his normally relaxed face was now tight, and the whites of his hazel eyes were bloodshot.

THE door beside Hayes opened and Wilmer entered, carrying a brown folder. He was in his shirtsleeves, his necktie pulled down and his collar open, and, as he approached, Flinn noted that the deeply tanned face of the physicist was as stubbled and tired-looking as his own felt. He was about the same age as Flinn.

Wilmer tossed the folder on the desk in front of Flinn and then perched on one corner of the desk. He gazed at the parapsychologist for a long few seconds, his eyes startingly ice-blue in his dark face.

"Well," he said presently, "I guess you're wondering what this is all about."

"Yes, I guess I am," Flinn said wryly. "This bird dog—" he indicated Hayes with a nod of his head, and the agent retaliated with a flash of teeth— "hauls me away from an important experiment, loads me on an Air Force jet, and, after a high-altitude flight at God only knows what kind of fantastic speeds, I find myself in the holiest of holies, surrounded by MPs and — yes, you might say I'm wondering what this is all about."

Wilmer nodded patiently and rubbed one hand across his eyes.

"When you find out, you'll understand the reason for the secrecy." He faced Hayes. "How long have we been on this thing now, Fred? It seems like weeks."

"Ten days," the FBI man answered.

Wilmer shook his head slowly, then reached for the folder, opened it, and took out several scientific journals that Flinn recognized instantly. The physicist opened one of them.

"'Advanced Experiments in TP, by Patrick Flinn,'" he read. He laid the publication aside and picked up another. "'A Monograph on the Probabilities of TH,' same author."

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He quoted at random from the introductory page: "'It is therefore my belief, based upon recent preliminary experimentation, that not only can one mind be used to scan the thoughts of another, but that ideas and suggestions may be implanted upon another's mind without the knowledge of the receptor. This is not to be confused with simple telepathic 'sending,' where the receptor is completely aware of the other's transmission. This to which I refer may, at least in one phase, be described as hypnotic in effect. The possibilities of such influence over the mind-matter of another are more than somewhat considerable . . .'"

He paused, lowered the journal and gazed speculatively at Patrick Flinn. "Telepathy, telehypnosis," he said, rolling out the words as if they left a strange taste in his mouth. "Very interesting. Just how much truth is there in all this stuff? I mean, how far along are you, really?"

FLINN considered the question for a few seconds. It was one he had heard often, especially from his colleagues at the small California college where he held an assistantship in psychology. But after twenty years of skepticism—he had first discovered his rudimentary telepathic abilities just after graduating from college, and had been experimenting and advancing ever since — he had become immune to criticism.

"Very few people bother to read my articles," Flinn said evenly, "and still fewer understand them, and the *fewest* believe. But I can tell you I'm far enough along in my research to know that the human mind has latent powers that are, to quote my article, more than somewhat considerable."

Wilmer and Hayes exchanged glances.

"That's fine," Wilmer said, "but abstruse, wouldn't you say? What I'm getting at is, I want to see a practical demonstration."

"Put up or shut up, eh?" Flinn said.

"I'd rather call it an examining of credentials," the physicist countered.

"All right. I don't see any connection between my work and nuclear physics, but what do you want me to do? First, though, I'd better explain that I might fail. I'm really just on the threshold."

"Granted. So I'll make it easy. Suppose —" He looked over his shoulder, faced Flinn again, and continued in a low voice: "Suppose you tell me what the man at the far desk is thinking."

Flinn glanced past the physicist at the stranger across the room. The man seemed completely unaware of the others. He was poring over some papers that were spread out upon the desk.

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Flinn focused his eyes upon the man's head. His mind was really too steeped in fatigue for this sort of thing, but it was a chance not to be missed, a chance to demonstrate his talents in the presence of a responsible scientist, so he willed himself into a gradually deepening concentration. His eyes seemed to go myopic, out of focus. A gray, ethereal haze came into his consciousness, like swirling smoke. *Easy?* But presently a picture began to form, blurred at first, then fragmentary, then coming into identifiable clarity.

Flinn held it for a moment, before snapping back into objective consciousness. He was grinning slightly as his eyes refocused and came to rest on Wilmer.

"Well?" the physicist asked.

"What's his name?" Flinn said.

"Barnes. Robert Barnes."

"Say, Bob!" Flinn called out. The smallish, partially bald man at the far desk looked up and swiveled around to face him. "Tell me something, Bob," Flinn went on. "Do you act that way with all women, or just blondes?"

Barnes' placid face suddenly underwent a marvelous transformation. First he blushed furiously. Then his jaw dropped open and the high color began to drain away. He stared across the room, his face pallid.

"My God!" he managed to blurt in a stricken voice.

THERE was dead silence in the room as Wilmer and Hayes looked from Barnes' shocked face to Flinn's smiling one.

"I think it's obvious—" Hayes started to say.

"Me, too," Wilmer agreed. He looked sharply at Flinn. "Can you tell what I'm thinking at this moment?"

Flinn shrugged. "Not without a special effort, and I'm not going to make that effort unless I have to."

The physicist sighed and his tanned face relaxed a little. He looked at Flinn with a new respect. "I guess I'd better put you in the picture." He reopened the folder and extracted several newspaper clippings. "What I'm about to divulge is so unbelievable that—well, I'd best break it to you gradually. You know my job. That fact and this tan—" he pointed to his face — "should give you an inkling of what I've been up to the last few weeks."

Flinn thought, and nodded. "I'm to assume that you've been out in the Pacific, is that right?"

"Yes," Wilmer said. "Eniwetok. Have you been following our progress in the papers?"

"Not really. I've been a little too busy, I'm afraid."

"No matter." The physicist handed the clippings to Flinn. "Read these."

Flinn scanned the first clipping. It bore a recent date.

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"'. . . Reliable sources,'" he read aloud, "'report that a civilian, believed to be a scientist, is being held incommunicado in the Pentagon. All efforts on the part of newsmen to gain additional information have been met with polite but firm rebuffs. Spokesmen from the AEC have refused to confirm or deny theories that the man's detention is in some way connected with the recent fiasco at Eniwetok Atoll . . .'"

He read the second. It was datelined Honolulu, a week before the other.

"'Beyond the terse comment that there were "no casualties," all official sources are silent today concerning the news leak of the failure of a nuclear device in our Pacific Test Area. It has been understood that this device, the third in a series of thermonuclear test shots, failed to detonate. Since this test was scheduled to have been a "tower shot," under rigid instrumental control, much speculation has arisen . . .'"

Flinn looked up hopelessly. "I don't understand. Does this concern you? I mean—"

"It concerns *all* of us," Wilmer said grimly. "But I know what you're getting at. No, I'm not the man they mention. I was in charge of that particular test."

Hayes cleared his throat abruptly and Wilmer nodded.

"I want you to understand, Mr. Flinn, before we go any further, that everything you hear and see, and have heard and seen from the time Fred first contacted you, is to be held in the strictest confidence. Is that clear?"

"Yes."

"All right. How much do you know about atomic physics?"

FLINN spread his hands. "I'm somewhat past the Democritus stage, but I don't claim to be an expert."

"Well, basically, in a thermonuclear explosive device, hydrogen is transformed into helium," said Hayes. "In the process there is a loss of mass. This loss results in a tremendous and sudden release of energy. Are you familiar with the energy-mass relationship, $E = MC^2$?"

Flinn nodded.

"Okay. In other words, the nuclei of hydrogen atoms are fused under the influence of great heat, resulting in a different element, less mass, a release of energy, and an explosion."

"I'm with you so far," Flinn said.

"Then you realize that once this fusion process commences, nothing in God's great universe can stop it?"

"Yes."

"And that after certain things are done, fusion *must* result?"

"Surely."

"Well, so all of us believed, too.

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But we were wrong about it."

"I don't understand. You just said—"

"So I *said*. But let me try to describe to you the situation as it happened." He paused, not for dramatic effect, but to take a moment to force himself to recall what Flinn could see must have been a very painful experience.

"We are on the command ship," Wilmer continued, "at a safe distance from the atoll. Everything is in readiness, checked and double-checked by me, personally. The automatic firing process is in progress. The last countdown has commenced. Five, four, three, two, one, zero. *Nothing happens.*

"I'll simplify the subsequent chain of events. After a reasonable interval, a volunteer pilot and myself and one other man fly by helicopter to the atoll. We climb the tower. I'm sweating and so are the others. We're standing beside a *live hydrogen bomb.* I disconnect the power sources and do various things to render the device safe. Then we check. Everything — *everything*—is in working order. There is absolutely no reason why the thing failed to detonate. Yet it did fail.

"We fly back to the command ship. We hold an emergency conference. We're sitting there staring at each other. Then this — this man, Dobbs, starts to laugh. We think it is hysterics, due to the tremendous strain that everyone has been under. But apparently it isn't. He laughs and laughs and laughs. Finally he manages to say: 'You can't figure it out, can you? Well, I know. Old Dobbsie knows. *It didn't explode because I willed it not to!*'"

Flinn's mind was almost too tired to accept what he had heard. "Are you trying to tell me—"

"Figure it out for yourself," Wilmer said flatly. "It's your field. Telepathy, telehypnosis, and what's left?"

"*Psychokinesis,*" Flinn said in a stifled voice.

"Right. Psychokinesis. Mind over matter."

ORDINARILY, Patrick Flinn would have used the morning ride over Washington's broad avenues to good advantage — this was his first visit to the nation's capital — but his mind was too filled with the preceding day's revelations to permit anything save minimal sightseeing.

"I hate to keep repeating myself," Wilmer was saying, "but I must be certain you understand what's at stake here."

"I know," Flinn answered with some impatience. "I'm not to reveal, under any circumstances, the fact that I have telepathic powers."

"Correct." The physicist sat in the seat beside Flinn, and Hayes was in front beside the driver.

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"Your job is to find out just how much this man *can* do. We'd like to know the *way* he does it, too, but that's secondary."

"It strikes me," Flinn mused, "that anyone who can influence a fusion bomb can do anything."

"That's what we're afraid of." Wilmer looked soberly at the parapsychologist. "I think I can understand what's going on in your mind. This is your special love and you're finding it difficult to divorce yourself from pure clinical investigation. You want, really, to talk to Dobbs as one scientist to another. But I must warn you that this is impossible. If he gets the least inkling that you're a special mind, something disastrous may result. As long as he gets what he wants, fine, but rub him the wrong way and—"

"And yet you have him a virtual prisoner and he doesn't object?"

"Well, at least not strenuously," Wilmer said. "I don't profess to understand a warped mind, but apparently Dobbs realizes that his confinement is mostly protective custody. It's to his own advantage. After all, he doesn't have to stand up at a public forum and shout threats. All he has to do is contact the few to reach the many. And if he has the powers he says he has, full use of them would result in his own destruction. And he doesn't want that. He's too interested, right now, in satisfying his own animal appetites. But faced with losing everything—"

"Our biggest immediate worry," Hayes said from the front seat, "is keeping all this from the public. That's why we put Dobbs out of sight in a hurry. There have been some leaks already, but so far most people consider the papers' theories as just so much wild speculation. And thank God for that. You can understand why all recognizable public figures are keeping as far away from Dobbs as possible."

FLINN nodded; it was self-evident. There were other phases of the problem that bothered him more. He was still vaguely and, as it seemed, illogically worried about the several questions he had raised the day before.

The fact that Dobbs might have read his articles and hence might put two and two together, despite a cover identity, was the least of them. Flinn had never lectured in public, his efforts had received no publicity except in specialized psychological circles, and his latest monograph on TH had been published when Dobbs was working at the atoll.

Wilmer, Hayes, and others had managed to assuage reasonable fears on the other point. Flinn had always assumed thas psychokinesis would be the logical result of advanced telepathy, that they were

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links in the same chain. Now it seemed that a person could be one without the other. Either you possessed a latent ability to scan mind-matter, or an affinity for material substance, but not necessarily both.

Earlier, Wilmer and Hayes had devised a test to check the possibility that Dobbs was an advanced telepath. They had mentally vilified him beyond the ability of even an accomplished actor to resist, over prolonged periods of time, and yet Dobbs had shown not the least indication that he had intercepted their thoughts. But there was one additional point.

"You used the expression 'warped mind' in describing Dobbs," Flinn said to Wilmer. "Is it your opinion then that he is definitely psychopathic? The reason I ask is that scanning a confused mind may prove to be more than I can handle."

"I used that expression for want of a better," Wilmer answered cautiously. "Put it this way — suppose you suddenly found you were able to control, even in a minor way, the stuff of the universe; would you use those powers for the benefit of mankind, or would you leap over the traces and reach for all the things that had been denied you over the years for moral, or legal, or whatever reasons?"

"You paint a lurid picture," Flinn said.

They turned down a side street in a residential district and drew up in front of what appeared to be a large two-story private home.

Flinn took a deep breath. He was rested now, but still uncertain whether he was up to what lay ahead.

After the preliminary discussion with Wilmer, Hayes, and Barnes—the latter had proved to be a military intelligence man — the previous afternoon, Flinn had been closeted immediately with a number of generals, admirals, and high-ranking civilians from both houses of Congress, the Defense Department, the Department of State, and various security agencies.

There had been the usual skepticism until he had performed some simple but histrionic "mind-reading" feats, and then there had been much talk about the responsibilities that had now become incumbent upon him and how perhaps even the fate of the nation was in his hands. It had left him wandering in a jungle of doubts and fears. Yet he had managed to sleep.

"The wonderful ability of the human mind to reject unpleasantness," he had told himself.

As a matter of fact, he had fallen into deep, untroubled unconsciousness within an hour of the time his head had first touched the pillow in the comfortable hotel room the government had provided. Hayes

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had been with him. "Security," Hayes had said.

And now, clean-shaven, his clothes neatly pressed, the substantial breakfast still warm in his stomach, and fatigue no longer in his muscles and nerves, Flinn told himself that he was as ready as he would ever be.

THEY got out of the conservative, unmarked sedan and approached the house. There was a man mowing the lawn, another clipping hedges, and still another polishing a car that was parked in the driveway just outside the spacious garage.

"How's it going?" Hayes said to the hedge trimmer.

"All quiet," the man answered without looking up.

They went around the house and entered unchallenged through a side door. It was all very casual, yet Flinn did not have to be told that they were under constant scrutiny.

The room in which he found himself was just off the kitchen. Three men in working clothes sat around a table, drinking coffee. They looked up and nodded. They seemed to be cut from much the same cloth as Fred Hayes, even to the expression.

"Well, well," one of them said, "the brain trust." He surveyed Flinn with frank interest, then faced Hayes. "Say, buddy, how does a man get a transfer out of this outfit?"

Hayes grinned his wolfish grin. "All in good time, partner." He pointed with his chin upstairs and raised his eyebrows.

The man who had spoken, a large, broad-shouldered youngster with an affably homely face, got up, stepped back from the table, and went into a vaudevillian travesty of a bow. "The great man has been prepared and awaits your presence." Then his expression changed. "What a party! I never saw so much liquor in my life! It's a lucky thing the rumpus room is soundproof."

"And girls!" one of the seated men said. "Man, oh, man!"

Flinn looked at Wilmer, and Wilmer shrugged as if to say, "That's the way it is."

"Just don't forget what you're here for," Hayes said harshly.

"Don't fret," the big man said. "None of us touched a drop."

"Neither did Dobbs," one of the seated men interjected. "I guess that's the only reason he's alive today." He guffawed loudly and suggestively.

Hayes leading, they entered a hallway and turned toward a flight of stairs.

"Your boys seemed very offhand about all this," Flinn said to the government agent.

"Don't kid yourself," Hayes replied. "They're as nervous as cats."

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"COME in, gentlemen," Dobbs called amiably from the rear of the spacious bedroom. There was an unobtrusive man in a dark suit with him, but he left immediately.

Now that he was face to face with the enigmatic Mr. Dobbs, Flinn felt a momentary sense of disappointment.

Malcolm Dobbs sat in a straight-backed chair beside the large bed. Next to him was a table laden with empty breakfast dishes. Dobbs was dressed in an ordinary bathrobe. He appeared to be in his mid-forties and had a full head of dark hair, slightly gray at the temples. His mild, undistinguished face was only slightly less tanned than Wilmer's, and he was of average size and weight. His dark eyes were the only things that belied the man's composed exterior; they were intelligent, interested, and intently watchful. A tiny smile lingered upon Dobbs' lips, as if he were sharing only with himself some form of immensely funny but eminently private joke.

Flinn's total impression of the man was that he was not the sort one would look at twice in a crowded room — under different circumstances.

"Another delegation?" Dobbs asked. "Hello, Jack, Hayes."

"Mal this is Mr. Dugan," Wilmer said, indicating Flinn. "He's from the government."

Even as he acknowledged the introduction, Flinn paused momentarily over the casual familiarity between the physicist and the apparent psychokinetic, until he was reminded that they were both nuclear physicists and had been together for weeks at the atoll. Flinn found himself wondering how close they had been and what thoughts must be going through Wilmer's mind at the moment. But he squelched his curiosity. He was here to scan Dobbs' mind, nobody else's.

"Be unobtrusive," he had been warned. "Stay in the background as much as possible and let Wilmer and Hayes carry the ball. And do the job quickly."

Dobbs looked Flinn over carefully, then seemed to dismiss him from his mind, as if he had decided Flinn was of no particular importance — or no immediate threat.

"You boys should have been here last night," Dobbs smiled. "We had quite a party." His smile faded and he added petulantly: "The only thing — some of the girls weren't as cooperative as I had hoped."

"We'll be more selective next time," Hayes promised quickly.

"See to it," Dobbs said.

They seated themselves, Hayes and Wilmer close to Dobbs, and Flinn just far enough away to seem deferential without raising suspicion.

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"Now, what can I do for you?" Dobbs queried. "Another demonstration, I assume?"

"That's right," Wilmer said. "How about that disappearance thing again?"

DOBBS sighed. "You boys just can't get it through your skulls that what I do isn't some sort of trick, can you? Even faced with the evidence of the bomb."

Wilmer raised his hands. "It's not that so much, although what you can do, you'll have to admit, is rather unbelievable. It's the fact that Mr. Dugan here has never seen any evidence of your powers, and the report he will deliver to his superiors may cause even more commotion in high places — to your advantage."

Flinn was amazed that such a flimsy appeal to the appetites and ego of a man as intelligent as Malcolm Dobbs could be successful. Yet it not only could, it was,

Dobbs looked again at Flinn, the strange smile playing upon his lips; then he reached across the table, picked up an opaque glass water carafe, poured out its remaining liquid into an empty cereal bowl, and replaced it on the table.

"We don't want water spilled over everything, do we?" he said.

Wilmer slipped one arm behind the back of his chair and signaled urgently to Flinn.

Since entering the room, Flinn had been gathering all his resources for a quick and powerful effort, and, at the sight of Wilmer's waving fingers, he began.

He was startled that, despite the interaction and interference of the other thought patterns in the room, he was able to make so quick a contact. Just before reaching Dobbs' mind, the thought impressed itself upon Flinn that the reason was the immense mental power that was building within, and generating from, Dobbs. It was the simplest piece of telepathic scanning with which Flinn had ever been involved.

For a matter of seconds, nothing happened. Then the water carafe abruptly disappeared, its passage into apparent nothingness coincident with a faint "pop" as the air of the room rushed in to fill the vacuum.

Dobbs turned triumphantly and saw Flinn still in the trancelike stupor of the telepath-in-contact. Hayes stood up to screen him, but Flinn shook his head and managed to clear his mind quickly.

"Your friend seems somewhat astounded," Dobbs chuckled.

"My God!" was all Flinn could say.

Wilmer and Hayes looked at him questioningly, and Hayes muttered: "I think he's seen enough. Let's get out of here."

"Come back anytime, gentlemen," Dobbs said.

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His laughter followed them as they retreated through the door and down the hall to the stairs.

"WELL?" Wilmer said.

They sat around the table in the room just off the kitchen, steaming cups of coffee in front of them. The three security agents who had been in the room were gone now to their respective duties.

Flinn gazed down into the dark depths of the coffee, trying to organize his thoughts; trying to interpret and evaluate what he had seen.

Wilmer and Hayes sipped their coffee, waiting with forced patience for the parapsychologist to speak.

Presently, Flinn shivered and looked up at them. "If he says he can control a critical mass, or erase Washington, D. C., or destroy the nation, you'd better believe him."

"He's telling the truth then," Hayes said grimly.

"Yes," Flinn answered. "Here are my findings. Somehow Dobbs has established rapport with the atom. Any atom. Probably any number of atoms. I doubt if he can move one single mass in the ordinary conception of psychokinesis. That is, I doubt if he can cause a pebble, say, to shift one millimeter. What he *can* control are the forces that bind atoms into molecular structures, or that hold nuclei together. Do you understand what I mean? For example, what he did up there just now was to get rid of the space between atoms in the molecules of that water carafe. I saw it clearly; there's no mistake. The space ceased to exist, the atoms crashed in upon each other, and the carafe seemed to disappear. The mass is the same. It's simply in a different form."

He paused and scanned the numb faces of the government agent and the nuclear physicist beside him.

"Let's get down to specifics," he continued. "What's his trump card? What is it he's holding over our heads?"

"The atmosphere," Wilmer said painfully.

"Oxygen," Flinn mused. "Suppose Dobbs concentrated upon the oxygen atoms all around us and caused their nuclei suddenly to fuse. What would happen?"

"Nobody on the face of the Earth would know what hit him," Wilmer said. "The Moon would probably be blasted out of its orbit. And if there is any intelligent life on Mars, they'd be treated to a sight they'd never forget — if they survived it."

"Well, then," Flinn said, "we've done what we came here to do. What's the answer?"

Hayes' face set into a hard mask. "There'll be a meeting of the brass, of course. But I can tell you what the result will be. I'll be assigned to kill him."

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A BUZZ of excited conversation filled the Pentagon conference room. Flinn sat in one of the several dozen chairs between Wilmer and Hayes and looked at a glass ashtray that lay on the part of the long table just in front of him. One day perhaps he, too, might be able to influence the molecular structure of such an object. Or, more likely, one of his descendants, because he would never be able to discover the short-cuts now.

Planned murder. All the resources and brains of the government, the champion of the rights and dignity of the individual, gathered together to plot the deliberate destruction of one man.

It filled Flinn with sadness. It was inevitable. It had to be done. No one had the right to put himself above the rules of social conduct and the welfare of several billion innocent souls. And yet—

He found himself wondering what the Founding Fathers would think of such a move. ". . . all men are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights . . . Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." Executions of criminals were the result of lengthy legal processes, during which all the rights of the individual were scrupulously observed. But this—was he also one of the judges? Let the punishment fit the crime. What about the judging?

"Isn't there some other way?" Wilmer broke into his thoughts. "That's what you're thinking, correct?"

Flinn managed a faint smile. "And I'm supposed to be the telepath."

"Let's be entirely rational about it," Wilmer said. "Dobbs is a brilliant man, granted. But he is also a lecher and a coward."

"There's some of the pig and the wolf in every man," Flinn said.

"Depends on the extent," Wilmer went on. "Dobbs is way overboard. And he's a craven. I know it's hard to picture a man who voluntarily crosses a bridge into the unknown as anything but brave. I suppose there is a sort of bravado in it. But when he turns that bridge into a club to threaten the rest of mankind — is this courage?" He turned to the FBI man. "What do you think about it, Fred?"

Hayes pulled himself out of the shell of disciplined impassivity into which he had retreated shortly after passing his own unofficial death sentence upon Dobbs. He looked at the physicist and the parapsychologist.

"Nothing," Hayes said bluntly. "Absolutely nothing. I'm just one of the expendables."

"Aren't we all?" Wilmer said. He shrugged at Flinn. "That's why we were chosen originally. Me because I was there at the atoll when

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all this started, and was acquainted with Dobbs, and capable of understanding the implications of his acts. Hayes because—"

"Because I've a good enough record to be above suspicion, and because I'm young enough not to be missed," the agent said.

"And you, Pat," the physicist said to Flinn, "because of your unique talents. But now we're all under the gun."

THERE was a lapse in the background noise, and the three turned to see the President's representative rise and signal for order. He was a tall, graying man, beautifully dressed, and, as he spoke, there was a note of sad resignation in his voice.

"So, gentlemen, since reasoning with Dobbs has proven to be useless, we find ourselves in agreement. All that remains is to select the time and the method. And, by the way, Mr. Hilliard—" he nodded at the Director of the FBI — "has assured me there is no need to deviate from our original plan, at least so far as the human element is concerned. Agent Hayes will remain our — messenger. He seems to be ideally suited for the job."

There was a visible stir down the length of the table as the top men from the government tried not to look at Fred Hayes. None of them succeeded. Under their brief, self-conscious but probing scrutiny, Hayes' hard face betrayed not a flicker of emotion.

"And now the time and the method." The Presidential assistant cleared his throat and scanned the faces of the men before him. "I should think as soon as possible." A murmur of assent swept the room. "There remains the problem of method. Dr. Wilmer cautions that it must be done very efficiently. If Dobbs even suspects that his life is to be forfeit at a predictable time — well, I hardly need tell you the danger. Director Hilliard suggests that we leave it up to Agent Hayes, since he knows his own capabilities better than anyone else. Mr. Hayes?"

The tall, athletic agent rose, reached under his coat to his right hip and produced a short-barreled revolver. He held it up. "With this," he said laconically. "In the head. Death will be instantaneous."

There were sudden protests from the military representatives.

Hayes holstered the revolver and looked at his chief. Hilliard nodded, and Hayes walked to the end of the room. From a carton, he lifted a small bullet trap and placed it against the wall. The safe area inside the trap was about the size of an opened magazine. Then he moved to the conference table, picked up one of the ashtrays, returned to the trap, and propped the tray against it.

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Appropriately, the tray was about the width of a man's head.

Agent Hayes stood up, buttoned his coat and began walking leisurely away from the trap. At twenty paces, he whirled. It was almost too fast for the eye to follow, but the individual actions were these:

With his left hand, Hayes unbuttoned his coat. With his right, he swept open the coat, turned in a crouch, simultaneously drew the revolver, and fired. The ashtray assumed a new identity — a scattered pile of broken glass.

It all happened in measurably less than a second.

There was a collective expiration of breath from the men around the table.

BEFORE breakfast the next morning, there wasn't a single one of the small group of men intimately involved with the top-priority problem who did not know that Hayes had failed.

This was shocking enough in itself, but what made it even more so was the fact that Hayes was still alive to tell it—and that anyone else was there to hear him.

"I came as close as hell to swearing," Hayes said dully to Wilmer and Flinn.

Neither of them needed any special powers of observation to see that the young agent was shaken. The three sat in the small Pentagon office. Coffee had been served, and they were waiting now for a quorum of the governmental officials to gather.

"I had it lined," Hayes continued. "I'd waited half the night for everything to be just right. I was in a good position, close and to one side. Dobbs was as relaxed as I've ever seen him. I was just telling myself *'Now'* when Dobbs looked directly at me and grinned. 'If you're planning on doing anything rash, my friend, don't. You can't possibly kill me swiftly enough to keep from destroying yourself, every person in this room, every man, woman, and child in this city, and every living thing on the face of this Earth.' *What could I do?"*

"Thank God you didn't figure it was just a bluff!" Wilmer exclaimed. "Pulling that trigger would have been the greatest blunder in history."

"Move and countermove," Flinn mused. "It was our gambit and we were checked before we started."

"So I got on the open line and told the boys to fetch Flinn as quickly as possible," Hayes went on. "But I still don't understand. I'd swear that man read my mind."

"I don't think so," Flinn said. "I've had two mental contacts with Dobbs, and neither time did I get the least suggestion that he was telepathic."

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"No need for him to be," Wilmer said. "It doesn't take a smart man to put two and two together and arrive at four. And this man is more than merely smart."

"I suppose you're right," Hayes said, "but it sure knocked the props out from under me."

THEY were all in attendance, most of them looking rumpled and gritty from lack of sleep and the realization that they had been beaten.

"I just don't know," a senator said wearily. "First a man who can influence matter, then one who reads minds, and now the latter tells us the former is inviolable. It's too much for me."

"I refuse to accept defeat!" a fleet admiral thundered, bringing his fist down upon the table explosively. He was an erect, bristling man with an aggressive combat record in two wars. "We've lost the first round — so what? There will be others."

"I quite agree," the Presidential assistant said. "This man *must* be destroyed. Already he's beginning to make impossible demands."

"But how do we go about it?" a congressman said. "Personally, I think we're licked. As far as I can see, the best thing to do is let him have his head and hope for the best."

"Hope for the best?" a man from a security agency echoed incredulously. "It's power Dobbs wants — recognized power. He wants to be feared and worshipped. Sooner or later he'll let everyone know. His egotism will force it. Can you conceive of what that would mean? For myself, I'd rather see the entire human race disappear in one flash of fire without ever knowing what hit it than live under the thumb of the fear of destruction!"

"Gentlemen!" The Presidential assistant rapped for order. "Let's examine the situation rationally and seek out the flaws. There must be some somewhere. Nothing in the mind of man is perfect."

"Well, this comes as close as anything," Wilmer interjected. "You ask what's wrong with the direct approach — why not shoot him while he sleeps? Well, I'll answer with some questions. Have any of you died as the result of a bullet in the brain? Have you ever questioned anyone who has been killed in that manner? Then how do we know there isn't a microsecond of awareness before life is extinguished? And even — or especially — on the subconscious level, isn't this enough time for a preset signal? What's the time-lag between countdown zero and the explosion of a thermonuclear bomb?"

"Apparently he has us blocked in every way," Flinn picked up Wilmer's argument. "Asleep or

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awake. Conscious or unconscious. It's all the same. Think of it as a special circuit in his mind. Destroy Dobbs, the circuit shorts, and this preset signal to the oxygen atoms is sent, their nuclei fuse, and that's the end of everything."

He scanned the faces of the men around the conference table. "Or think of it as a hypnotic suggestion. Under hypnosis, an individual is given a certain order that he is to carry out whenever a certain set of circumstances or stimuli occurs. No matter when this happens, no matter what he is doing or thinking when the moment arrives, the subject reacts according to the order buried in his subconscious."

"But for every move there is a countermove," the admiral argued. "This is a situation. A fantastic one, but a situation. There has to be an answer."

"I think there is," Flinn said carefully, "but it could be very risky."

IT was up to the committee now. The decision rested squarely in the lap of the United States Government. Flinn had stated his ideas, presented his plan, and tried to give the odds — although in his heart he knew that was impossible — so it was now out of his hands.

Or was it?

The parapsychologist lay on the bed in his hotel room, trying to relax, trying to store up energy for the ordeal that might be imminent. Hayes and Wilmer were in the room, too, awaiting word from the heavily guarded conference chamber in the Pentagon.

The thin physicist paced up and down, his tanned face a study in strain. Wilmer had been with this as long as anyone, except Dobbs, and Flinn found himself wondering what deep inner resources the man had tapped to retain his sanity.

The big federal agent slouched in a chair, looking at nothing. He had lapsed again into the welcome protection of training and discipline.

Several times during the past thirty hours, since presenting his plan, Flinn had had to restrain himself from probing the minds of his two associates. At a time like this, no one had the right to invade another's privacy. And curiosity had to give way for another reason — just one look into either of their minds might be enough to weaken or shatter his own resolve.

The classic dilemma. Do nothing and face a living hell. Act and court destruction. The very simplicity of the alternatives made the problem intolerable.

Telehypnosis — the untried hypothesis.

Good Lord! Flinn told himself.

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I'm not even proficient as a telepath yet!

Outside, he could hear the murmur of the city — the traffic, the people, moving along their separate paths to their own destinations in the humid afternoon heat.

Well, anyway, once the complete curtain of security had fallen, there had been no more leaks. Proving that if a secret was big enough, it could be kept.

Another classic problem. Do the people have the right to be informed? Does forewarned really mean forearmed? And how about the other nations of the world?

AN hour after the dinner dishes had been cleared away by the government agent dubbing as a room-service waiter, the telephone rang with an awful insistency.

Wilmer was the closest, but Hayes beat him to it by a full stride.

After identifying himself, Hayes listened in silence. Then he said, "All right," and replaced the receiver.

He nodded at Wilmer and Flinn.

"It's go ahead." He paused and his face seemed to change—to relent somehow. "And they wanted me to relay this message: The President says, 'May God be with you.'"

Flinn felt very alone and very close to something terrible.

In the gloom of the darkened bedroom that adjoined Dobbs', he could see Wilmer silhouetted against the meager light that came through the curtained window from the street lamp outside and Hayes was out in the hall. But the knowledge of the proximity of the two men did nothing to lessen Flinn's loneliness. The committee had even couched it as an order, trying to relieve him of that small burden, but if he failed, who would remain to accept the blame?

A few times in his forty-two years had Flinn wondered how it would feel to have the fate of the world riding upon his shoulders. Now he knew and wished he didn't.

The door opened silently and Hayes eased in.

"He's asleep," the agent breathed in a barely audible voice. "You can start anytime now."

The plan was simple, deceptively so.

Since Dobbs' block was a kind of self-hypnotic thing, why not countermand it with a deeper hypnotic suggestion introduced by telepathy? If it could be done and was strong enough, the second would counteract the first. At least for a short time.

There were terrifying flaws — the first one obvious, the second not so easily seen.

Suppose Dobbs' block had in-

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herent within it an anti-disturbance feature that might react to any interference, including hypnotism in any form? Then the result would be an immediate "short-circuit" and — disaster.

Trembling with the responsibility that was upon him, Flinn forced himself into a deep concentration, an almost cataleptic trance. All details of the room faded from his consciousness. There was the familiar gray, swirling mist, and, for what seemed an intolerably long time, he fought to make contact with the sleeping man's mind. He almost sobbed aloud from the effort.

Then at last he found it, entered, and gradually pushed down through the subconscious.

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HE was seeking now, probing for the deep-seated level of the block that he had discovered the second time he had investigated Dobbs' mind.

It was very difficult with the sleeping man and, before he found it, more than once he felt himself standing on the precipice of the unknown, close to slipping away into a fright-filled nothingness.

Finally, he had it, clear and cold. The strange, unhuman, inscrutable area that was in diabolical rapport with the basic stuff of one element of the atmosphere. Flinn lingered there for a while, wondering again why he could not read it completely, then forced himself on and on, deeper and deeper, until at last he felt the limit had been reached.

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His own warning thought intruded, telling him that this was the place. And the time for the first test was at hand. He could not afford the luxury of another pause. His resolve might crack...

The thought arced like a high-voltage spark, the preamble of the counter-suggestion: *You are to do nothing. No matter what happens, no matter what is done to you, you are to take no action whatsoever. You are not to react. You are to do nothing. You are to disregard every thought but this.*

The battle had been joined. The interference had bridged the gap — yet the block remained dormant!

The first hurdle had been cleared.

For the better part of three hours, Flinn continued to transmit the counter-suggestion. Although he was not aware of it, sweat rolled from every pore of his body and his nerves spasmed in unfelt agony.

Something happened.

Flinn lost contact as a shrill of warnings welled through Dobbs' mind.

A second later, the door opened and Hayes' voice hissed: "He's awake!"

Flinn returned to awareness slowly. First he was conscious only of how tired he was, and then he knew that a voice was trying to reach him, and he felt a handkerchief swabbing at his face.

Wilmer bent over him in the gloom.

Hayes said in Flinn's ear: "Dobbs is awake. He knows something's wrong. He's moving around in there."

"Then go ahead," Flinn heard his voice say. "There won't be a better time."

"Maybe we should wait," Wilmer cautioned.

"No! Do it now. Hurry!"

The agent stiffened, stepped back, and disappeared.

They heard the door to Dobbs' room open and close and the sound of voices.

There was an exclamation, then Dobb's voice shouting: "What are you doing? Are you crazy? I warn you, *I'll take every one of you with me!*" Then a sudden explosion, muffled, but still shockingly loud, and the thump of a heavy object falling.

Flinn could not bring himself to move a muscle.

THE silence seemed absolute. It was as if even the house itself were listening, straining, preparing itself for the inevitable.

One second passed.

Two.

Five.

Ten.

Nothing happened.

Abruptly, Wilmer shouted: "It's all over!"

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Flinn heard footfalls upon the stairs and the sound of excited voices.

Hayes burst into the room and turned on the light, the .357 magnum still in his hand. His face was pale; his mouth worked, but no sound emerged.

Flinn found that his muscles would obey him now, and he stood up and headed for the door. He felt numb, drained. He stepped out into the hall. Every special agent and security man on the premises was crowded there.

Flinn turned back to Hayes.

"I never thought to ask before," Flinn said. "Dobbs — did he have any close living relatives? A wife? Children?"

Hayes shook his head.

"Thank God for that!" Flinn said.

He started down the hall toward the stairs. The men there grew silent as he approached and moved soundlessly out of his way.

He went down the stairs, through the room off the kitchen, and outside to the driveway. He looked up at the dark sky.

It's over, he told himself. *And now I'm a murderer. All of us are. A guilt shared by the few to save the many. But the few are the product of the many, just as each individual is, so where are we to place the blame?*

Twenty years of research, and where had it led?

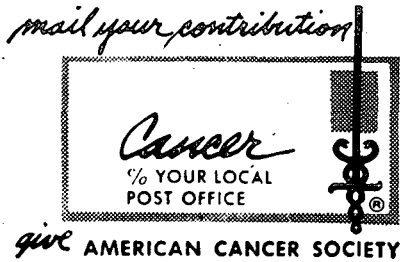
Somewhere he had failed as society had failed, and, even in success, Flinn could feel no flush of victory.

The Earth was safe, but every human upon it had died a little without even knowing it.

Yes, it's over, Flinn thought finally. *For now. Until the next time.*

He could see no stars. In a while it would be dawn.

— JIM WANNAMAKER



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(Continued from page 7)

terms what these gifts of the laboratory will mean.

Who's going to try it?

How about you?

FOR there is a turnover in magazines that seems to run in a five or ten-year cycle. Every magazine knows it. Sometimes the period is longer, sometimes less; but over a few years there will be almost a whole new body of readers and a corresponding change in the names appearing on the contents pages.

Science fiction is peculiarly fortunate in hanging onto some of its best people — Clifford D. Simak and Murray Leinster, who go back almost to the very beginning of magazine science fiction; Heinlein, Asimov, Pohl and a number of others with more than twenty years of service. But these are the exceptions. The magazine of a decade ago will show a major fraction of names which no longer appear on any contents page in the field.

Some go on to other fields, turning to writing books or even turning away from writing altogether. Some just don't have the stamina or the ingenuity to keep up. A few (including, in the recent past, some of the very best, like Kuttner and Kornbluth) are lost to us through death.

Tomorrow's writers come from today's readers. We know that in any given month from ten to a hundred readers will sit down at a typewriter, shrug, say, "Why not?" and plunge ahead.

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And then — what hapens to the people involved, their habits and their conflicts?

That's the question — and our writers, old and new, have to provide the answers!

— H. L. GOLD

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